

A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Brill's Companions to European History

VOLUME 3

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/bceh

A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography

Edited by

Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2013

Cover illustration: "Clio, Muse qui préside à l'Histoire; Clio, Muse presiding over History"; Arthur & Compagnie; Joseph Laurent Julien; Louis Jean François Lagrenée; Reg. No. 1901,0417.67; PRN. PPA51605; Image 00098677001. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Enlightenment historiography / edited by Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling.

pages cm. — (Brill's companions to European history ; Volume 3)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-25185-4 (hardback : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-90-04-25184-7 (e-book)

1. Enlightenment. I. Bourgault, Sophie. II. Sparling, Robert Alan, 1975–

B802.C625 2013

907.2'04—dc23

2013011760

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual "Brill" typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2212-7410

ISBN 978-90-04-25185-4 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-25184-7 (e-book)

Copyright 2013 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Global Oriental, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers and Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA.
Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling</i>	

PART I

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIANS

1. Edward Gibbon: Historian in Space	25
<i>Robert Mankin</i>	
2. Politics and Culture in Hume's <i>History of England</i>	61
<i>Simon Kow</i>	
3. William Robertson: The Minister as Historian	101
<i>Jeffrey Smitten</i>	
4. Montesquieu and Plutarch: Reflections on Historical Analysis in Broader Social Scientific Comparison	133
<i>Rebecca Kingston</i>	
5. Voltaire: Polemical Possibilities of History	153
<i>Siofra Pierse</i>	
6. Herder in 1774: An Incomplete Philosophy of History	189
<i>Bertrand Binoche</i>	
7. Giambattista Vico's New Science of the Common Nature of the Nations	217
<i>Donald Phillip Verene</i>	

PART II

THEMES AND REGIONAL CONTEXTS

8. German Enlightenment Historiography and the Rise of Historicism	249
<i>Ulrich Muhlack</i>	
9. Identity and Innovation: Historiography in the Scottish Enlightenment	307
<i>David Allan</i>	
10. The Beginnings of Enlightenment Historiography in Britain	343
<i>Noelle Gallagher</i>	
11. <i>Philosophes</i> , Anticlericalism, Reactionaries and Progress in French Enlightenment Historiography	373
<i>François-Emmanuel Boucher</i>	
12. The Divinity of Human Making and Doing in the 18th Century	401
<i>Sandra Rudnick Luft</i>	
13. Philhellenism among the <i>philosophes</i> : Ancient Greece in French Enlightenment Historiography	437
<i>Sophie Bourgault</i>	
14. Roman Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain Beyond Gibbon: Ancient Norms of Empire for Moderns	469
<i>C. Akça Ataç</i>	
Index	505

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

David Allan is Reader in History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His books include *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (1993), *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (2001), *Adam Ferguson* (2006), and *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (2010).

C. Akça Ataç is Assistant professor of political history at Çankaya University, Ankara. Her research interests include theories of empire, historical cosmopolitanism, eighteenth-century British Empire, and European integration history. Among her recent publications is "Re-entering the Cosmopolitan Phase of Imperium" in *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*. She is currently working on Adam Ferguson's views on empire.

Bertrand Binoche is professor of philosophy at Université Paris-I/Panthéon-Sorbonne. His work has centred both on the Enlightenment and the philosophy of history. Among his books are the following: *Les Trois Sources des Philosophies de l'Histoire* (1764–1798) (1994), *Introduction à De l'Esprit des Lois de Montesquieu* (1998), and *La Raison sans l'Histoire* (2007) and *Religion privée, opinion publique* (2012).

François-Emmanuel Boucher is the director of the Department of French Studies at the Royal Military College of Canada. Among his publications are *Les Révélation Humaines* (2005), *La Paix. Esthétiques d'une éthique* (2007), *Pour ou contre la métaphore* (2009) and *L'esthétique du beau ordinaire dans une perspective transdisciplinaire* (2010).

Sophie Bourgault is Assistant professor of political theory at the University of Ottawa, Canada. Research interests include the deployment of the ancients in French Enlightenment thought, as well as the political and musical thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Noelle Gallagher is lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture at the University of Manchester. Her latest publication is *Historical Literatures: Writing about the Past in England 1660–1740* (2012).

Rebecca Kingston is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. She is the editor of *Montesquieu and his Legacy* (2009) and author of *Montesquieu and the 'parlement' of Bordeaux* (1996). Her most recent work is *Public Passion. Rethinking the Grounds for Political Justice* (2011).

Simon Kow is an Associate Professor of Humanities in the Early Modern Studies Programme at the University of King's College, Canada. His current research is on Enlightenment views of China.

Sandra Rudnick Luft is Professor at San Francisco State University. She specializes in 16–17th century History of Ideas. Publications include *Vico's Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science between Modern and Post-Modern* (2003).

Robert Mankin teaches 18th- and 17th-century intellectual history in the English Department of the University of Paris-Diderot. He is the editor of a volume of early writing by Edward Gibbon (*Essai sur l'Etude de la littérature*, [1761] 2010) and a contributor to the *Oeuvres complètes de Montesquieu* (2010).

Ulrich Muhlack is professor emeritus of historical methodology and the history of historiography at the Universität Frankfurt am Main. Among his many publications are *Geschichtswissenschaft im Humanismus und in der Aufklärung. Die Vorgeschichte des Historismus* (1991), *Der Humanismus als kulturhistorische Epoche* (2004), and *Staatensystem und Geschichtsschreibung. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zu Humanismus und Historismus, Absolutismus und Aufklärung* (2006).

Síofra Pierse is Lecturer in French and Francophone Studies at UCD Dublin. She has published articles on eighteenth-century topics including the city, female authorship, historiography and Voltaire. She is editor of *The City in French Writing: the Eighteenth-century experience* (2004) and author of *Voltaire Historiographer: Narrative Paradigms* (2008).

Jeffrey Smitten is Professor of English at Utah State University, where he teaches courses in British literature with a particular interest in Scotland and the Scottish Enlightenment.

Robert Sparling is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre de Recherche en Éthique, Université de Montréal. He is the author of *Johann Georg Hamann and the Enlightenment Project* (2011).

Donald Phillip Verene is Candler Professor of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy and Director of the Institute for Vico Studies at Emory University. He is Fellow of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Among his numerous works are *Vico's Science of Imagination* (1992), *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and Finnegans Wake* (2003), and *Giambattista Vico: Keys to the New Science* (2009).

INTRODUCTION

Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling

“The common opinion that the eighteenth century was an ‘unhistorical’ century, is not and cannot be historically justified.”¹ So wrote Ernst Cassirer in 1932, redeeming what David Hume himself had termed the ‘historical age’ from nineteenth-century disdain. Certainly, it is hard to quibble with Cassirer—the sheer variety alone of eighteenth-century historical writing and historiographical reflection is enough to make one wonder just how that old saw about the ‘unhistorical Enlightenment’ got propagated in the first place, and the number of writers standing up for Enlightenment historiography has now grown so much that some have been confident in declaring that old prejudice “demolished”.² Yet old judgements die hard: one can still read declarations such as the following, from a 2005 textbook on historiography: “The historical outlook of the Enlightenment was not genuinely historical.”³ What is meant with this sort of assertion is not that the great Enlightenment historians did not write important historical work; it is rather that they lacked a certain sensibility we are supposed to have gained from romantics, historicists and professional historians. Enlightenment philosophers’ awareness of time is supposedly linear, their conception of human nature fixed and unchanging, their theories of causation crude and arbitrary, their conclusions excessively normative, if not outright moralizing. Their purposes are generally denounced as concerned more with 18th century battles (if not outright ideology) than with a sincere and careful attention to the past.⁴ Worse yet, history was for them the basis for generalizing about human nature. In this sense, they evinced a rationalist, abstract-universal disdain for the particular paired with an unfounded optimistic account of human ascent from childhood to

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston, 1955), p. 197.

² Donald Kelley, *Faces of History: from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, 1998), p. 218.

³ Tej Ram Sharma, *Historiography: A History of Historical Writing* (New Delhi, 2005); the line is derived directly from Collingwood, with whom Sharma agrees fully.

⁴ Frederick Coplestone offers the standard charge that Enlightenment historians “were too much inclined to use history to prove a thesis, to glorify the Enlightenment, and their prejudices made it difficult for them to penetrate with sympathetic understanding into cultures and outlooks which they felt to be very different from their own and which they were inclined to despise.” *A History of Philosophy: Voltaire to Kant* (New York, 2003), p. 165.

scientific rationality. Yet Enlightenment history is, paradoxically, also accused of being insufficiently scientific, projecting onto the past false universals, allowing too much room for conjecture where documentary evidence is lacking, and even going so far as to re-craft Christian millennial thought in the secular language of 'progress'. As Michael Bentley asserts, "In generalizing its perceptions of a particular present and ironing out kinks in the human condition, eighteenth-century thought lost contact with the specific and particular about which historians ultimately want to know. In reducing the world to law, the Enlightenment's understanding of history truncated the past as a domain for enquiry."⁵ Lastly, the great stylistic accomplishments that make eighteenth-century historians so delightful to read centuries later is itself a source of complaint—after all, the great historians of the eighteenth century were largely lovers (amateurs—or, as their modern critics would have it, dilettantes), not professionals.⁶ The professional, after all, tends to think that love is blind.

Whatever merit there is in such blanket accusations, they clearly run roughshod over a great variety of eighteenth-century thought. Can we really charge Vico with abstract universalism? Or Herder? Perhaps not, but they are notorious outliers... What of Gibbon, Robertson, Hume or Ferguson? It would be rather reductive, though R.G. Collingwood did make such a charge of Gibbon, arguing that Gibbon differed from other Enlightenment writers only in finding the golden age in the past (under the Antonines) rather than in a glorious future.⁷ But the charge that Enlightenment historians are unhistorical is itself a sign of the error so often attributed to the most naïve *philosophes*: it applies to the history of historiography a progressive narrative in which the present shines forth as the age of light, and all previous methods and historical projects are mere rough drafts of the final product, an article in the *American Historical Review*.

Readers of this *Companion* will learn to be wary of this method. They will note the great complexity of Enlightenment thought about history, its uses, its methods, its sources, its philosophical and political significance: the eighteenth century, this historical period in which the Enlightenment

⁵ Michael Bentley, ed. *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997), p. 405.

⁶ Bentley speaks of "the tattle of the *salon*." Ibid.

⁷ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York, 1956), p. 79. Collingwood simplifies polemically in these places. It is somewhat off-putting to see him, after spending several pages denouncing the Enlightenment historians' weak understanding of historical causality, offer this historical explanation: "Such inability to discover genuine historical causes is, no doubt, connected with the Humian theory of causation according to which we can never perceive any connexion between any two events" (p. 81).

took place, was a time not only of fevered activity on the part of historians, but also of penetrating inquiry into the place of reason in history, the relationship between secular and biblical time, the formation and evolution of civilizations, the causes for the rise and fall of empires, and the destiny of humankind. While some Enlightenment writers (such as Voltaire) must plead guilty to the common accusation of treating human nature as fundamentally the same in all times and places, to be judged according to the uniform and universal standards of Parisian intellect (hence the virulent Herderian polemic against this brand of history), others were thoroughly wedded to the Montesquieuan insight that particular periods, climates and conditions breed radically different spirits. (Herder castigated Montesquieu for excessive schematism, but he ought to have seen in him a possible ally rather than enemy.) The Enlightenment broadened existing debates—the ancient world, for instance, was no longer merely a treasure house full of Plutarchian exemplars of character, but a realm ripe for political and social analysis—and for contemporary deployment in arguments from historical analogy. (One can see this interesting shift in method and focus in Rebecca Kingston's exploration of Montesquieu's deployment of Plutarch, in chapter four of this volume.) The study of human institutions could no longer be narrowly legal, theological, or dynastic, but served a wider contemplative purpose, informed by a wider set of sources and an enlarged global outlook. The ambitious writer no longer sought glory in detailed erudition alone (a glory confined to the world of the specialists), but aimed to draw out the significance of the past for a wider public (however narrowly one wishes to construe the eighteenth-century 'public').

In what follows, we will consider some of the generalizations about Enlightenment historiography that can fruitfully be entertained. Throughout, the reader will note a certain parallelism between the charges of the Enlightenment's detractors and the claims we make on their behalf. An exercise in paradiastole, perhaps, but one that is necessary if we are to grasp the importance and relevance of the Enlightenment's historiographical contributions. For Enlightenment historical writing deserves our attention not as "a curious half-way house between an older world and the modern one,"⁸ but as a corpus containing living possibilities for thought. That which is most rejected by the professional historian today might be precisely that to which we ought most to attend. Or, if we decide

⁸ R.N. Stromberg, "History in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12:2 (1951), 295.

that the historical outlook of the Enlightenment is to be rejected, we will at least benefit from knowing what purposes it was intended to serve. At the outset, we must make the obligatory acknowledgement that generalizations about Enlightenment historiography suffer from the same problems that plague generalizations about the Enlightenment itself (or any intellectual movement for that matter): the world of letters in the eighteenth century was not populated by a gang of identical optimistic rational universalists. But after all, this straw-man is no longer one erected by any serious student of the period. Even Friedrich Meinecke, one of the central champions of the dualism that opposed the Enlightenment to historicism (characterized by the attention to historical particularity), is insistent on the deep roots historicism has in the philosophy of the eighteenth century.⁹ (Incidentally, Cassirer's argument for the Enlightenment's historical accomplishments suggests that they ultimately bore fruit in Herder's auto-critique of his age, thereby hinting that indeed there was something universalist that needed overcoming.) The question of whether the Enlightenment was 'unhistorical'—whether there is a rational, universalistic core to this intellectual movement—is not a frivolous one, despite appearing on the surface to be a generalization suitable only for mass-produced textbooks. There was a shift that took place in historical consciousness in the nineteenth century that made much Enlightenment history seem somehow superficial and naive. In giving the Enlightenment philosophical historians their due, it is important not to ignore the basis for this negative judgement.

Before we proceed, a brief comment on terminology is in order. Much of the confusion about the Enlightenment's historiographical contributions, like much of the debate over the nature of the Enlightenment itself, is due to the fact that the term is often used interchangeably to describe a historical period and a philosophical movement. We will not employ the term Enlightenment as a mere temporal marker—for this is a strategy that dilutes the concept to the point that it describes every piece of writing in the eighteenth century. Nor will we do away with the singular definite article before the term 'Enlightenment'. That said, we are aware that the convention of speaking in the singular has been repeatedly challenged in recent decades, and our continued use of that convention ought not to

⁹ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich, 1965). Frederick Beiser also points this out in his recent, highly laudable work, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford, 2011) p. 12, n. 22.

be taken as a denial of the variety of national, ideological, philosophical or confessional projects that were being pursued by men and women of letters.¹⁰

Of Universals, Presentism and Historical Change

The universalism with which the historians of the Enlightenment have often been charged is not hard to find. Hume asked,

Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the GREEKS and ROMANS? Study well the temper and actions of the FRENCH and ENGLISH: You cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former *most* of the observations, which you have made with regard to the latter. Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature[.]¹¹

Voltaire concurred: "Man, in general, has always been what he is."¹² When we read Hume, Voltaire, Raynal or Gibbon confidently judging distant periods and actors we are apt either to disdain or to envy their temerity. But we should be wary of discounting this universalism as naivety: it speaks to the great philosophical ambition with which Enlightenment writers approached their topic. Even Herder, for whom Voltaire's self-satisfied assertion was the central sin of his epoch, insists that there is but one humanity, and thinks that the study of history will help discover universal truths. It is merely that his universal is rendered much more complex, manifesting itself in many particular guises and subject to historical change. This is no small shift, and Herder's ire at the Parisian philosophers marks a serious breach in historiographical understanding, but the universalist ambition of his project is what makes some interpreters hesitant to dub him a counter-Enlightenment figure.¹³ The Enlightenment

¹⁰ One of the more important voices for the pluralisation of the concept is also one of the more important recent contributors to the study of eighteenth-century historiography, J.G.A. Pocock, whose monumental multi-volume work of Gibbon ought to be on the reading list of every student of eighteenth-century historiography. See his *Barbarism and Religion* 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1999–2011).

¹¹ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis, 1993), p. 55.

¹² Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris, 1996), p. 55. Translations, unless otherwise noted, are ours.

¹³ If we have pushed Herder closer to his enemies here, we might equally push his enemies closer to him in pointing out that one can spy moments in which Voltaire and

offered a view, which did not lose resonance in the Herderian attitudinal shift, that history should serve a wider philosophical function.

But let us not overstate this continuity between Herder and his historiographical enemies: a main strand of Herder's objections remains at the heart of the reaction to the Enlightenment's universalist aspirations. Bertrand Binoche's chapter six underscores elegantly the profound ambiguities of Herder's idiosyncratic philosophy of history; for a more general account of German Enlightenment historiography and the development of historicism, readers should turn to Ulrich Muhlack's comprehensive and judicious chapter (a chapter whose unusual length is justified by the double service it renders in surveying not merely German Enlightenment historiography, but the origins of historicism, two vital and highly complex events in modern intellectual history). The trouble, raised so effectively by Herder, was the following: how can one confidently conceive of an ancient Greek as a Frenchman in a toga? Can one really project the character of contemporary human beings onto distant times and climes? This hermeneutic difficulty points to a greater paradox—the Enlightenment offered a paean to experience, but so often appeared in the eyes of its detractors as sinning against the very precepts of empiricism. For to assume a static human nature is to read into the past from the present—it is, in effect, to project rather than to attend. But let us take a step back and consider briefly the role of empiricism in the Enlightenment.

The standard view of the Enlightenment as broadly Lockean or empiricist is not unwarranted, and insofar as the movement is a reaction against the 'esprit de système', it portends a reawakened sense of history's importance. The Cartesian mind had been suspicious of history. Certainly, Descartes thought there was some utility to the study of history, but for the most part history (when it wasn't mere fable) led people astray:

even the most accurate histories, if they neither alter nor exaggerate the significance of things in order to render them more worthy of being read, almost always at least omit the baser and less noteworthy details. Consequently the rest do not appear as they really are, and those who govern their own conduct by means of examples drawn from these texts are liable to fall into the extravagances of the knights of our romances and to conceive plans that are beyond their powers.¹⁴

Hume exhibit a rarely noticed consciousness of historical particularity. See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Science of Freedom* (New York, 1969), pp. 381–2.

¹⁴ Descartes, *Discourse on Method* tr. Donald Cress (Indianapolis, 1998), p. 4.

We see why Descartes turned to the ‘book of the world’, and, when this too proved insufficient, the book of the individual mind consulting its natural light of reason. But a heartily empirical age questioned this capacity to weave the world in logic from the solitary comfort of a warm room. Knowledge derives from experience. The reporting of scientific observations is fundamentally the reporting of events (ultimately known through the testimony of the senses)—thus the ‘history’ in ‘natural history’ comes to mean more than merely the ‘inquiry’ which its Greek origin implies, but bears some relation to civil history in being equally empirical. But natural history produced *repeatable* events—in this sense, its discoveries were distinct from the history of human events and institutions. “The laws followed by bodies constitute physics,” wrote Turgot, “always constant, we describe them, we do not narrate them.”¹⁵ One cannot recreate a historical event to verify it, but one has access to it nonetheless through the sources:

Possessor of the treasure of signs that he has had the capacity to multiply almost to infinity, he [man] can assure himself of the possession of all his acquired ideas, communicate them to other men, and transmit them to successors as an ever-increasing heritage. A continual combination of this progress with the passions and the events that they have produced forms the history of the human race, in which every man is but a part of an immense whole that has, like him, its childhood and its progress.¹⁶

For Turgot, this ever-accumulating body of experience was grounds for optimism that humanity was progressing. History, then, is not superfluous; like the testimony of our senses, the testimony of our ancestors is the very stuff of thought.¹⁷

¹⁵ Turgot, ‘Plan de deux discours sur l’histoire universelle,’ *Œuvres de Turgot* t.II (Osnabrück, 1966 [facsimile 1844]), p. 627. The use of the word ‘history’ simply to mean any type of descriptive inquiry (history of insects, history of plants, etc.) was waning. By the mid 18th century, the word had come to be exclusively linked to the study of the past, and its use to denote the study of the natural world was sufficiently obsolete that one almost invariably appended ‘natural’ to it in such instances. Voltaire’s *Encyclopédie* article *Histoire* states that the word ‘history’ in ‘natural history’ is improper. See Brian Ogilvie, “Natural History, Ethics, and Physico-Theology”, in Giana Pomata, *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Boston, 2005), p. 98.

¹⁶ Turgot, ‘Plan,’ p. 627.

¹⁷ Cf. Johann Christoph Gatterer, who defended the historical sciences’ foundation in experience as capable of commanding as much or even greater assent than geometry. See Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 112–18.

In political philosophy, the attempt to construct geometrical systems had produced modern natural law.¹⁸ Enlightenment historiography thoroughly transformed this study. For if one pastime was to derive the laws of nature from a speculative natural origin or some extra-historical human essence (two things that often ran together), another was to derive a rational politics from the study of actual institutions in history. When one reads Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, one is confronted with several pages of the first project, followed by seven hundred pages of the second. The great influence of this text—the wonder that it inspired in so many—was its power to derive general laws of political life from the great variety of human experience. Hume was in this spirit—and perfectly in keeping with his empiricism—when he wrote, “To balance a large state or society, whether monarchical or republican, on general laws, is a work of so great difficulty, that no human genius, however comprehensive, is able, by the mere dint of reflection, to effect it. The judgements of many must unite in this work: Experience must guide their labour: Time must bring it to perfection.”¹⁹ We are perhaps inclined to read in this a presentiment of Burke, and an anti-utopianism that strikes us as running counter to our expectations for Enlightenment rationalism; yet we might also read the presentiment of the Enlightenment project *par excellence*: the social scientific application of historical facts to the study of society. One looks to the sources and searches out the general elements of human nature and civil society from the steady passage of time.

But of course, one isn't always in possession of the facts: thus some of the more important developments of Enlightenment historiography were a result of breaching the rules of empiricism. Where documentary evidence was missing one did not invariably throw up one's hands, but one engaged in learned conjecture. This might be, as with Vico, expressed in a careful and profound consideration of myths and their signification (see Donald Phillip Verene's chapter in this volume for an authoritative account of this most original mind), but such philological efforts did not catch on until much later in the north. Hume was perhaps more typical in

¹⁸ The quintessential extra-historical model is Hobbes, who distinguished (in *Leviathan* ch. 9) between knowledge of fact, which is divided into natural and civil history, and knowledge of consequences, which is ‘science’ or ‘philosophy’, and which gives us civil philosophy. Hobbes did not in the least disdain history (no translator of Thucydides could entertain such notions), but he could never have made it the basis for civil science.

¹⁹ David Hume, “Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences”, in *Essays Moral Political and Literary* (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 124.

discounting such sources as entirely unreliable.²⁰ But conjecture could still proceed. Hume himself, so keen to portray English history with accurate thoroughness, found himself heavily drawn to conjecture in his *Natural History of Religion*, and in this he was in good company. Dugald Stewart, commenting on Adam Smith's dissertation *On the Origin of Languages*, noted "In examining the history of mankind, as well as in examining the phenomena of the material world, when we cannot trace the process by which an event *has been* produced, it is often of importance to be able to shew how it *may have been* produced by natural causes."²¹ Some element of rational conjecture was at the heart of stadial theory, theories of progress, and even speculative political theory such as Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, which offers a history that deliberately sets aside historical facts! No doubt, Rousseau can avoid the charge of treating Paris as the interpretive standard for understanding the ancient or prehistoric, but his speculations are part of a mode of thought that is widespread among writers who do not share the radicalism of his singular vision. When professional historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries decry this Enlightenment tendency to speak beyond what the sources will allow, they are implicitly arguing against the wider philosophical project that historical study served.

'Philosophy of history' is a phrase coined by Voltaire, but when we hear the words we are more inclined to think of Hegel. Our association is reasonable. Those who, like Voltaire, read history with an aim of discovering universal truths about human beings (or, to be less charitable, framed history to confirm polemical positions) appear more to be doing philosophy *with* history.²² But the conjectural turn in Enlightenment historiography often found itself expressing philosophy of history, in which the trajectory of human existence was given a meaning and structure separate from, or

²⁰ Hume, *History of England*, I, 1 "The fables, which are commonly employed to supply the place of true history, ought entirely to be disregarded; or if any exception be admitted to this general rule, it can only be in favour of the ancient Grecian fictions, which are so celebrated and so agreeable, that they will ever be the objects of the attention of mankind."

²¹ Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith," in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart* (Edinburgh, 1858) vol. X, p. 34. Excerpts under the title 'On Conjectural History' in Adam Budd, ed., *The Modern Historiography Reader* (London, 2009), 78–81.

²² For a more detailed account of Voltaire's use of the phrase 'philosophy of history' and of the various ways in which history was pursued philosophically in the eighteenth century, see Bertrand Binoche, *Les trois sources des philosophies de l'histoire (1764–1798)* (Paris, 1994).

with a complex relationship to, that found in scripture. The notion that the *philosophes* secularized theological claims is widespread,²³ though just what such a phrase might mean precisely is a subject of some considerable controversy (chapters eleven and twelve penned by François-Emmanuel Boucher and Sandra Luft offer two contrasting takes on this issue. Boucher offers insights into the striking structural similarities between the opposing narratives of ‘progressive’ *philosophes* and reactionaries; Luft asks us to reconsider the ‘secularized theology’ thesis by delving into the meaning of ‘theological’). It is not simply that Bossuet starts looking silly in light of Voltaire; it is that the human trajectory in time is given over to metaphysical and theological speculation of which Hegel is a radical outgrowth rather than an unprecedented innovator. When Lessing posited that the entire history of humanity—and particularly religious history—was to be interpreted as a kind of divine education, he was not merely offering the fanciful suggestions of a poet, but was asking a question about humanity’s origins and destiny, and what place reason and the seemingly irrational played in this story.²⁴ This conjectural turn would provide a new type of self-knowledge that would frame the political life and ideals of the modern bourgeois individual. “It is not true that speculation about these things has ever caused harm or been injurious to civil society,”²⁵ he insisted. On the contrary, such historically informed speculation—and such speculation-informed history—can open up vistas. And seeing these vistas is particularly important given that the traditional horizon increasingly appeared to be somewhat limited, like a *trompe-l’oeil* landscape on a theatre set. *Heilsgeschichte*, or the history of salvation, could not simply be incorporated into the new secular mind or the new time frames being offered by travel (rival chronologies of China and India) and geology (the rival chronology of the earth),²⁶ the question of how the two related was

²³ The locus classicus for this thesis in the English-speaking world is Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, [1932] 1964).

²⁴ It should be noted that this was also an important step in the dialectic of reason and unreason. Lessing, finding a hidden rationality in apparently irrational religious practices was following a path that had been broken by Vico (despite the fact that Vico was little known in eighteenth-century Germany): the rehabilitation of myth was a more profound entry into the subject of reason and unreason in history.

²⁵ Lessing, *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, par. 78.

²⁶ For an interesting treatment of this problem including discussion of the reaction to Buffon’s views of the earth’s pre-human antiquity, see Rhoda Rappaport, *When Geologists Were Historians, 1665–1750* (Ithaca, NY: 1997). For a more general, highly readable account of the intersection between historiography and natural science in the Enlightenment, see Nathaniel Wolloch, *History and Nature in the Enlightenment* (Farnham, 2010).

of an importance rivalled only by the more general question of where humanity was and where it was going.

This new type of historical consciousness crops up in unexpected places. Immanuel Kant is surely, with his steadfast attempt to carve out the realm of the *a priori*, one of the chief standard-bearers for extra-historical rational universalism. It was, after all, in this capacity that he inspired his critics, J.G. Hamann and J.G. Herder to historicize thought itself. Yet what, then, are we to make of Kant's profound awareness of his own historical situation?²⁷ Kant's question, 'for what may I hope,' ultimately had eternal and temporal answers, for his optimism about historical improvement, his famous foray into secular Chiliasm, is a pre-figuration of philosophy to come, and represents philosophy's attempt, late in the eighteenth century, to come to terms with a historical consciousness that had been nourished by the century's literary and scholarly activities. The notion of progress—understood in terms of historical teleology or simply as a desideratum to be pursued and documented—was one manner of coming to terms with a palpable sense that some things had changed. (On the notion of progress in the French Enlightenment, readers may see chapter 11 by Boucher.) Philosophers could debate the degree to which the basic atom of history—the human being—was fundamentally constant or in flux or the degree to which history was progressing or was fundamentally cyclical, but as the century wore on it became increasingly difficult to contest the fact that something new—unprecedented even—was taking place in the modern, commercial world of global trade. And many thought it for the better:

In Europe we can boast more than one hundred volumes of statutes dealing with sorcery and with how to distinguish a true witch from a false one. Grasshoppers and other insects harmful to our crops were routinely excommunicated, and in some rituals they still are. But the practice itself has disappeared; we now leave Aristotle, witches and grasshoppers in peace.²⁸

Thus, for all that Enlightenment writers sought lessons from antiquity or treated humanity as a universal category, there was a widespread awareness

²⁷ Foucault, for instance, made the important and somewhat counter-intuitive claim that Kant's *What is Enlightenment?* stands as a fundamental insertion of a historical consciousness into its self-analysis. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, 1984), pp. 32–50.

²⁸ Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, tr. Simon Harvey (Cambridge, 2000), p. 26. Voltaire would have been upset to learn that the real epidemic of witch burning came during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (times of great progress), while canon law in the tenth century, the darkest of the dark ages, declared belief in the existence of witchcraft to be heretical.

that something had changed, something was new, whether one praised it (à la Smith) or blamed it (à la Rousseau). Montesquieu looked upon ancient republics with a mixture of nostalgia and repugnance born out of a self-consciously modern outlook. There was, in the modern commercial world, something qualitatively different from the past. Certainly Rome could serve as a template for decline and decadence or imperial grandeur, but Roman wealth was of a radically different sort than modern commercial empire, and to think that one would go back was as fanciful as thinking that one could return to live with the bears. It is not that the ancient world no longer had normative bearing—on the contrary. As the chapters of Ataç, Bourgault and Kingston in this volume demonstrate, historical analogies with the ancient world were ubiquitous, and ancient lessons were treated as highly relevant.²⁹ But there was little denying that something new was afoot, a fact that even the most nostalgic could not help but recognize. Hence the wild claims for human progress; hence, equally, the wild lamentations of social corruption. From the optimistic Condorcet to the apoplectic Rousseau, there was a palpable sense of historical change. It is thus simply incorrect to say that Enlightenment historiography lacked a sense of historical change: it struggled precisely with this problem; it brought the problem of historical change to light. But it did so in light of a universalist project: not naivety, then, but intellectual ambition defined this project.

Objections to this universalist consciousness are many, and date back to the Enlightenment itself. When German writers grumbled about the tendency in Paris (and Potsdam) to think that the universal only speaks French they were expressing a foretaste of the post-colonial challenge to Eurocentrism. (Incidentally, the universal crossed the channel at some point. David Hume counselled Gibbon to write in English, foretelling that given British mastery over North America, English would supplant French as the cosmopolitan language of learning in the way that Latin had supplanted Greek.)³⁰ For the narrative drive that informed ‘universal history’ was indeed cosmopolitan,³¹ and cosmopolitanism has had, ever since

²⁹ For a recent, extremely insightful exploration of analogies to Rome (and to Roman imperialism) in eighteenth-century political thought, see Edward G. Andrew, *Imperial Republics: Revolution, War, and Territorial Expansion from the English Civil War to the French Revolution* (Toronto, 2011).

³⁰ J.H. Burton, ed., *Life and Correspondence of David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1846), vol. II, 24 Oct., 1767, p. 411.

³¹ A matter described by Karen O’Brien. O’Brien, however, rejects the post-colonial and post-modernist charges against Enlightenment historiography, insisting that such charges

Marcus Aurelius, an unhealthy relationship with empire. Voltaire championed the Romans, “This sovereign people [peuple roi] thought only of conquest, government, and how to civilise the universe.”³² Admirers of this cosmopolitan move, such as Karen O’Brien, insist that the cosmopolitan impulse is born of critical rationalism challenging previous false universals. The historicization of reason—the meta-critical attitude that subjects critique itself to critique—was yet to flower, but already in the Enlightenment the political implications of these universal ambitions were being felt and questioned.

It is a cliché to write, but it is no less true that the insistence on being critical is the defining characteristic of Enlightenment historiography. By this, we do not mean to invoke the precise technical meaning of ‘Kritik’ of the mature Kant, but merely the capacity to pass judgment, assess evidence, consider probability and to separate the right from the wrong, the wheat from the chaff, the true from the fabulous and the useful from the useless. Of course, this was nothing new—it is not as if previous generations had set out to be close-minded and unreflective. But there is a new urgency to the task of radical questioning and weighing of evidence. Pierre Bayle expressed this well when he defined himself as a Protestant, “for in the depths of my soul I protest against everything that is said & everything that is done.”³³ Such an attitude runs the risk of Pyrrhonism—and Bayle’s restless reason led him down the path of radical scepticism—but where history was concerned, he nonetheless felt that while historical truths could not command the same certainty as geometrical propositions, they could be evaluated according to criteria appropriate for that study.³⁴ Gibbon said no less: “geometry concerns itself with demonstrations that are only to be found within itself: criticism (*la critique*) balances different degrees of likelihood.”³⁵ This raised its importance: after all, it is those very things that only admit of probable truth that happen to be most important to us: “It is in comparing them that we order our everyday actions, and that we

set up a straw-man Enlightenment that bears little relationship to the work of the writers in question (in her case, Robertson, Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, and the lesser-known David Ramsay), who were actually sceptical challengers to previously dominant meta-narratives, p. 10. See also the chapters of Kow, Smitten and Allan in this volume.

³² Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, tr. S. Harvey (Cambridge, 2000), p. 32.

³³ Cited in Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis, 1993), p. 26, n. 31.

³⁴ Günther Pflug, “The Development of Historical Method in the Eighteenth Century,” *History and Theory*, 11 (1971), 3.

³⁵ *Essai sur l’étude de la littérature*, p. 48.

often decide our own fate.”³⁶ A critical spirit serves to make one’s history more accurate, no doubt, but also more useful. For one does not merely relate past events as reported by a literary authority, but one examines the assertions in light of reason and experience and applies oneself to rooting out fanciful fable and unenlightening fact.

This critical attitude certainly undermined biblical literalism and it had anti-ecclesiastic implications, but it should not be taken as necessarily anti-Christian. Voltaire might have wished to crush infamy, and Gibbon may have made subtle incisions into the infamous thing with the rapier of ironic wit, but others were less certain where infamy was to be located. (And we might add here that it was a commonplace among many of the more anticlerical *philosophes* to believe the masses required some religious prejudice.) It is too hasty to assert that the core of Enlightenment is opposition to Christianity. (Chapter eleven of this volume, focusing on the radical Enlightenment and its even more radical enemies, points to a central ideological clash, but readers should be wary of taking the anti-Christian sentiment expressed by the likes of d’Holbach as the Enlightenment’s defining feature).³⁷ William Robertson was a clergyman, and while liberal in his attitude to individual freedom of belief and friend of the famous unbeliever Hume,³⁸ he was no less Christian for all that. (Jeffrey Smitten’s chapter in this volume usefully highlights Robertson’s intersecting roles of minister and historian.) But the natural light of reason does tend to illuminate texts differently from the light of faith, and this can make for some discomfort. The *Encyclopédie* article ‘Critique’ by Marmontel is typical in its hesitant and somewhat unconvincing defence of applying this technique in such a tender spot: “Given that holy history is revealed, it would be impious to subject it to the examination of reason; but there is a manner of discussing it that will serve to make faith itself triumph.”³⁹ No doubt (for to think otherwise would be impious), but is it not just possible that it might have the opposite effect? The critical mind turned the study of scripture into the study of scripture’s history. History became a powerful interpretive tool. Whether or not Jonathan Israel is correct

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 48–9.

³⁷ For a revision of this story, one might look to David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008). One will also fruitfully consult Ulrich Lehner, *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment* (Leiden, 2010).

³⁸ Stewart J. Brown, “Robertson and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in S.J. Brown, *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 17.

³⁹ *Encyclopédie*, 4:490. In passing, Marmontel cites Montesquieu as a great living exemplar of how to pursue history critically.

to make Spinoza the founding father of the Enlightenment, the Spinozist interpretive claim that one ought “to accept nothing as an authoritative Scriptural statement which we do not perceive very clearly when we examine it in the light of its history”⁴⁰ is of foundational importance. This application of historical scholarship could be crude and polemical or sophisticated and philological (as in the case of German biblical philology), it could be respectful of theology, or thoroughly anti-ecclesiastical (as in the case of d’Holbach’s *Histoire Critique de Jésus-Christ*), but the very method of studying eternal things from a temporal and critical perspective was intrinsically dangerous.

Peter Gay summed up the contribution of Enlightenment historians as that of “science, art, and propaganda”⁴¹ but these three terms (and their modern inflections) could be treated more generally as descriptions for that amorphous eighteenth-century activity known as philosophy. They do, however, point to three important dimensions of what is both praised and blamed in the activity of the ‘luminous historians’.⁴² Enlightenment history was ‘science’ in its aim to achieve wider universal understanding of humanity and civil society. This, as we have noted, is one source of the charge that the Enlightenment is extra -historical. It was ‘art’ (in the sense of being creative and aesthetic) in its stylistic developments.⁴³ History was in equal measure diversion and instruction, and one would err gravely if one thought that the appetite for both was limited to a small elite (on these issues, see the rich chapters of Noelle Gallagher and of Siofra Pierse in this volume). Linda Kirk cites a bookseller who recommends William Robertson as a writer whose works would be pleasing, edifying and *affordable* to both “the man of the woods, as well as the man of the court.”⁴⁴ Advertisers may be permitted some exaggeration, but it is certain that serious history was being read by much more than the man of the court—the man and woman of the town and country were pleased to become conversant with the past. Hume’s most important philosophical work might have fallen ‘stillborn from the presses,’ but his histories

⁴⁰ Spinoza, *Works of Spinoza*, tr. Ewles, vol. 1, *Theologico-Political Treatise* (New York, 1951), Ch. 7, p. 101.

⁴¹ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation: the Science of Freedom*, p. 368.

⁴² We borrow this phrase from the title of Patricia Haddock’s, *Edward Gibbon, luminous historian, 1772–1794* (Baltimore, 1989).

⁴³ The issue of style and stylistic developments is tackled in several chapters in this volume: see particularly those of Mankin and Gallagher.

⁴⁴ Linda Kirk, “The Matter of Enlightenment,” *The Historical Journal*, 43:4 (2000), p. 1129.

were bestsellers. Voltaire knew a thing or two about marketing, and he equally knew that one did not advance human knowledge and felicity—or a political cause—by boring people to death. Contra nineteenth-century critics of Enlightenment history, Mark Salber Phillips has pointed out that “alongside its ‘philosophical’ detachment, Enlightenment historiography also responded to a strong sentimentalist influence that focused on the aesthetic attractions and moral training that result from soliciting the reader’s sympathy.”⁴⁵ There is a reason that the famous historians of the eighteenth century are still read—and read widely, outside of academic circles—today. And it is equally a basis for the denigration of the Enlightenment’s historical achievements. Voltaire had the chutzpah to accuse Montesquieu of trying to be clever rather than accurate, calling the baron’s great but highly epigrammatic masterpiece ‘de l’esprit sur les lois’ (wit (or jokes) on the subject of the laws).⁴⁶ Today’s professional historian might cast this stone at the lot of them. Sour grapes from the prosaic? Perhaps that’s harsh, but style is more than *l’homme même* (as Buffon had it)—it is the necessary condition of popular utility. Hume praised Gibbon for ‘dignity of style,’ ‘depth of matter’ and ‘extensiveness of learning,’ in that order.⁴⁷ Professional history today is perhaps a thousand times more accurate and detailed than in the eighteenth century, but can we truly assert that it has anywhere near the appeal and influence on the mind of the reading public?

Was the extensiveness of learning sacrificed for the dignity of style? On this topic, it is worth pointing out a simple structural factor that favoured the development of selectivity and narrative skill: the massive weight of available scholarship.⁴⁸ William Robertson wrote, “The universal progress of science, during the last two centuries, the art of printing, and other

⁴⁵ Mark Salber Phillips, “Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography,” *PMLA* 118:3 (2003), 446.

⁴⁶ Céline Spector & Thierry Hoquet eds, *Lectures de l’Esprit des lois* (Pessac, 2004), p. 9. Apparently this bon-mot came from Mme Du Deffand, but Voltaire repeated it on numerous occasions.

⁴⁷ “Whether I consider the Dignity of your Style, the Depth of your Matter, or the Extensiveness of your learning, I must regard the Work as equally the Object of Esteem.” *Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1932) 2:309. Quoted in John Vladimir Price, “Review of Craddock, *Edward Gibbon Luminous Historian* and David Womersley, *The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,” *Modern Philology* 88:3 (1991), 325.

⁴⁸ Two now classic sources on the battle between the 17th and early 18th century ‘érudits’ and the *philosophes* is Arnaldo Momigliano, “Gibbon’s Contribution to Historical Method,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 2:4 (1954), 450–463 and Chantal Grell, *L’histoire entre érudition et philosophie: étude sur la connaissance historique à l’âge des Lumières* (Paris, 1993).

obvious causes, have filled Europe with such a multiplicity of histories and with such vast collections of historical materials, that the term of human life is too short for the study or even the perusal of them.”⁴⁹ Thus one must select, organize, and focus on that which is sufficiently relevant to the reader. This is not a matter of being more or less erudite, but of exercising literary judgment for the purpose of raising the utility of one’s matter. (Incidentally, Robertson managed to combine erudition with style, providing a very lengthy section of endnotes on “proofs and illustrations” that he thought necessary for rigorous antiquarians, but harmful to the narrative sweep of his work.) Gibbon might have spoken of Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* as “un monument éternel de la force, et de la fécondité de l’érudition combinée avec le génie,”⁵⁰ but it would be Gibbon’s stylistic genius that would make his history read and digested in a manner that Bayle’s was not (Bayle was rather picked through and plundered). Gay’s ‘art’ and ‘science’ have a similar root in the availability of printed material and the necessity of organizing it for reflection.

And what of ‘propaganda’? Naturally, what Gay had in mind here was the mixture of political and ideological commitments that inspired the work of Enlightenment historians. No doubt this is central to the story. Apart from the foray into universal history, which, in its confrontation with previous, avowedly theocentric versions of that genre, has strong ideological overtones in its depictions of the battle between reason and ignorance through the ages, we also see attention to national and regional histories (on this issue, consider David Allan’s comprehensive survey on Scottish identity in Scottish Enlightenment historiography (ch. 10) and Simon Kow’s elegant treatment of Hume’s *History of England* (ch. 2)); at the same time as the issue of national character was being broached there were equally a number of histories whose perspective was decidedly cosmopolitan. Beyond this, there were the standard run of legal and political matters of dispute about which one might appeal to history. That history should possess political significance was hardly an eighteenth-century discovery, of course, but it was given a new urgency in an age that placed a primacy on utility. But how should history be employed to inform socio-political life? Naturally, there is the traditional view that studying great figures of the past helps form character and judgment. Bolingbroke’s famous

⁴⁹ William Robertson, *History of the Reign of Charles V*, 2 vols. (London, 1857), 1: vii.

⁵⁰ Edward Gibbon, *Essai sur l’étude de la littérature* (London, 1761), p. 15. Note that this text derives from the period prior to Gibbon’s taking Hume’s advice and writing in English.

quip that “history is philosophy teaching by examples” is a classical cliché that justified Plutarchian exemplarity, and it certainly had a solid place in the eighteenth-century mind.⁵¹ But such history had been in vogue since the renaissance, and had even flourished throughout the Middle Ages (and the utility of such reading was a point even Descartes conceded).⁵² The quip belies Bolingbroke’s actual practice, for while the *Patriot King* can in some sense be classed with classic mirror-of-kings tracts, in the *Dissertation upon Parties* his practical purpose in describing English history was to invoke it as a source and justification for a series of institutions he thought endangered in the burgeoning military-bureaucratic state. A solid dose of Enlightenment criticism informed longstanding debates about the nature of given nations’ constitutions and laws. When one reads the last books of Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois* one is often left wondering what all of this strange detail on obscure Frankish institutions is supposed to mean. But when one recognizes that Montesquieu was engaging in a debate about the legal origins of the modern French state—its legal pluralism and the importance of its intermediary institutions—one starts to see how apparently dry historical debates have very important constitutional implications.

The republic of letters praised impartiality, but partiality both sells books and, more importantly, inspires writers. Diderot, in his additions to Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*, begins in a voice that takes pride in its even-handed focus on the impersonal truth: “I hope [my future readers] will see how detached I have been from any passions and prejudices, and that they will be unaware of the country of my birth, the government under which I lived, the position I occupied or the religion I professed.”⁵³ He then goes on to denounce arbitrary government in the most frantic manner—not prejudiced, perhaps, but certainly passionate. Coming to terms with commercial empire, national identity, religious reformations and wars, centralized government, ecclesiastical power, technological innovation... all of this required cool historical perspective yet demanded hot political engagement. And in the eyes of many Enlightenment writers, there was no reason to believe that those two things were mutually exclusive.

⁵¹ Henry St John 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, “Letters on the Study and Use of History,” *Works* 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1841), II: 177. Bolingbroke himself attributes the line to Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

⁵² Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*: “Je savais que... les actions mémorables des histoires le relèvent [l’esprit], et qu’étant lues avec discrétion elles aident à former le jugement”, p. 38.

⁵³ Diderot, *Political Writings*, eds. Mason & Wokler (Cambridge, 1992), p. 169.

But in general, the term ‘propaganda’ is misleading—the overtones of the word today suggest a wilful manipulation of the facts for purposes of mass control or influence. Not all the Enlightenment historians conceived of themselves as fighting the good fight nor would they have relished the notion that they were so partisan, and the fact that they were at pains to establish their lack of partisanship (and to condemn the rank partisanship of their adversaries) is testament to the great importance they accorded to the ideal of objectivity.⁵⁴ The ideal of objectivity remained at the heart of critical historical inquiry. But that did not make the study of history any less a subject of pressing concern rather than cool detachment. Pierre Bayle was a polymath of the highest order, and he employed this skill to confound the intolerant. His *Critique générale de l'Histoire du Calvinisme du P. Maimbourg* was precisely this deployment of historical erudition for political ends, and his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* not only served to scandalise and entertain, but was a veritable armory for a century of *philosophes*.⁵⁵ But if historical knowledge served argument, it should not be confounded with apologetics:

I believe . . . that one would do well to counsel a zealous Huguenot neither to attempt to write a history of Calvinism, nor one of Lutheranism . . . nor any other of this nature. Your heart has been wounded, one should say to him: you have conceived a hatred for the persecutors and you are gnawed by an ardent zeal for your cause; you would not give us a history, but rather the writings of a lawyer[.]⁵⁶

A critical attitude demands certain intellectual virtues, and while later writers such as Voltaire would explore, in Siofra Pierse’s words, the ‘polemical possibilities’ of history, they would not dispute this point. Yet their practice would remain thoroughly engaged, for if there is one thing that the Enlightenment cannot abide it is to be *useless*. ‘Presentism,’ perhaps; so, at least, a critic might charge. But the Enlightenment knew the uses of history for life.

⁵⁴ Montesquieu complained of Voltaire, “[il] est comme les moines, qui n’écrivent pas pour le sujet qu’ils traitent, mais pour la gloire de leur ordre. Voltaire écrit pour son couvent.” Montesquieu, *Pensées*, 929, p. 1252.

⁵⁵ What it did not do was to provide a narrative. Its vast collection of facts, arguments and critical judgments were so ordered as to undermine a global historical consciousness. Thus, it really served as a quarry from which Enlightenment historians drew their materials.

⁵⁶ Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 2nd Ed. (Rotterdam: 1702) Rémond, p. 2570.

'Presentism' is not to be equated simply with Herbert Butterfield's 'Whig history'. Or rather, the 'Whig' tendency to see history as progressing to our current state of perfection is but one manifestation of presentism. Enlightenment historians were on the whole presentist insofar as their employment of history served contemporary political and philosophical concerns. No doubt a writer like Hume desired to get things right, to depict an event, as Ranke would later want, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen,' but the purpose of this is better to know human nature in general and the English political condition in particular. Radical Whig republican historian Catherine Macaulay did not think Hume's history a fountain of scholarly objectivity, and she lamented its success: "Mr. Hume's prejudices have fallen in with the prejudices of the prevailing faction of this country."⁵⁷ That he was the prejudiced ideologist for a faction would have been most unwelcome news to Hume,⁵⁸ but he certainly intended his work to have contemporary resonance. Historians in general did not hide from the contemporary implications of their work. Some were quite direct in their presentism. Schiller declared, "To us belong all the treasures that hard work and genius, reason and experience have, in the long age of the world, finally brought home."⁵⁹ History was a field to be harvested. The tone of that quotation is perhaps slightly too dithyrambic for mainstream Enlightenment tastes, but which Enlightenment historian would have quibbled with Schiller's view that "just as one ought to be a good citizen of his country, so too should one be a good citizen of his time"?⁶⁰ We should probably add that this presentism is also what informed the notorious Enlightenment disdain for mere erudition. To some extent, all their denigration of dry pedantry sounds like the anxiety of influence, and the debates about erudition a mere tempest in a teapot (although, as Chantal Grell's work has shown, it was a large teapot).⁶¹ Gibbon took D'Alembert to task for granting insufficient respect

⁵⁷ Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Revolution* (London, 1781), vi. For a nice survey of responses to Hume's *History of England*, see James Fieser, ed., *Early Responses To Hume's History Of England* (Bristol, 2003).

⁵⁸ Indeed, as Nicholas Phillipson argues, this was precisely what Hume wanted to overcome. *Hume* (London, 1989), p. 141.

⁵⁹ Friedrich Schiller, *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?* (Jena, 1789), p. 31.

⁶⁰ Schiller, *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen* (Stuttgart, 2000), #2, p. 9. "Man ist eben so gut Zeitbürger, als man Staatsbürger ist."

⁶¹ Chantal Grell, *L'histoire entre érudition et philosophie: étude sur la connaissance historique à l'âge des Lumières* (Paris, 1993).

to erudition.⁶² But who would have disagreed with Voltaire's famous sally in his *Encyclopédie* article, "If you have nothing more to tell us than that one barbarian replaced another barbarian on the banks of the Oxus and the Jaxartes in what way are you useful to the public?"⁶³ This overwhelming concern with being useful and relevant is precisely what rankles the more scrupulous professional historian. Is it not also what made history Enlightened? For even Herder—the thinker who most balked at presentist prejudices and who most broke with his contemporaries over their lack of attentiveness to difference—was nonetheless centrally concerned with the project of discovering the nature, duties and destiny of humanity, a passionate enterprise that is somewhat at a distance from the more modest and minute task of the pure professional historian.

But we will now end these general comments before the charge of oversimplification weighs too heavily upon us. Enlightenment historiography is complex, with numerous variations in style, method, intention, regional and political preoccupations. Like Robertson, we will point to the veritable mountain of material as an excuse for selectivity. Readers of this volume will undoubtedly lament the relative absence of important figures like Giannone, Raynal (and Diderot),⁶⁴ Dubos, or Fontenelle; they will rightly object to the fact that many significant writers such as Ferguson, Millar, Kames, Smith, Mably, Iselin, Schlözer, and Gatterer are not granted stand-alone chapters, but are treated in the context of national or thematic surveys. And no doubt will readers correctly regret the fact that this *Companion* deals with figures who all lived within the confines of a fairly narrow geographical space. (Though, in passing, they inhabited a number of different intellectual spaces; Robert Mankin's chapter on Gibbon offers us a thoughtful meditation on the various manners in which space

⁶² We might add, however, that D'Alembert was also taking his contemporaries to task for deriding excessively the *érudits* and the 'compilateurs'. See his *Discours préliminaire* (Paris, 1986), pp. 152–53.

⁶³ 'Histoire', *Encyclopédie*, 8: 225.

⁶⁴ The Abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770–81), partially written by Diderot, is a work whose popularity, and whose philosophical, historical and historiographical importance are such as to merit being brought out of the literary wilderness. Some recent work by Anthony Strugnell, Sankar Muthu, J.G.A. Pocock and Guillaume Ansart promises to bring Raynal and Diderot's philosophical history to wider attention. A decent introduction is offered by Peter Jimack in his recent abridged translation with Ashgate Press, Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *A History of the Two Indies: A Translated Selection of Writings from Raynal's Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Wiltshire, 2006).

informs historical writing.) We cannot disagree with these lamentations—a second volume would doubtless be desirable. The study of eighteenth century intellectual history has experienced a marvellous proliferation in the last half-century, with many previously neglected authors and themes receiving attention. The pluralisation of the Enlightenment, the study of forgotten thinkers and regions, the examination of the social and material dimensions of historical writing all merit wider attention than we have been able to provide in this volume. Given the wide intended audience of this *Companion* and its attempt to do dual service to neophyte and expert alike, we have sought to reconcile the competing imperatives of doing justice to the complexity of the movement and covering adequately some of its most influential figures and debates. Thus we have married interpretive surveys (which chart both the familiar and the less well-known) with close studies of towering historical thinkers. In the first part of the *Companion*, readers will find detailed treatments of specific authors: Gibbon, Hume, Robertson, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Herder and Vico. Part II of the *Companion* proposes wider themes of national and thematic context. English, Scottish, French and German Enlightenment historians are discussed, as are the concepts of historical progress, secularism, the origins of historicism and the deployments of Greek and Roman antiquity within 18th century historiography. The chapters of this volume do not offer a unitary vision of the Enlightenment; rather, readers will note the disciplinary, methodological and interpretive pluralism within the volume's chapters. What they have in common, however, is that they have all attempted to balance the competing imperatives of narrative and erudition, philosophy and detail; they have tailored their articles so as to provide sturdy footholds for those new to the subject, yet point to new vistas for the established scholar of historiography and the Enlightenment. Most of all, they have all revealed the wider philosophical, literary, and political importance of historiographical debates—and the centrality of those debates in the development of the intellectual project that has most defined modernity.

PART I

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIANS

1. EDWARD GIBBON: HISTORIAN IN SPACE

Robert Mankin

Our spiritual history is grown less sublime, without becoming more intelligible.¹

The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire remains one of the great monuments in the history of history. Perhaps it has endured so well in spite of changes in the societies that read Gibbon and in the expectations they formed for works of history, because it was a project that was sensitive to the energies that make societies work. Whether for Rome, Byzantium, Islam or modern Europe, the *Decline* appeared to take the pulse of civilizations, surveying the ways they advanced and failed, fell and were renewed. Not the structures, not the systems, but processes of life, death and renewal. Perhaps too the *Decline* was so knowing and has proved so enduring because it was itself a project that unfolded in time. The first volume studies the period from the end of the Antonines in 180 AD to the military triumph of Constantine in 324 AD whereas the Preface outlines a far more ambitious “general plan” running to the year 1453 at least. Even as the author indicates this as the proper time frame in which to consider his subject, he announces he may never reach his goal (1:1–3, 8–18). As it happened, Gibbon’s readers were not left with a more or less meaningful fragment. He succeeded in carrying out the full plan, and his six volumes and three thousand pages were published in three installments over more than a decade (one volume in 1776, two in 1781, three in 1788). Not only did the quantity of print increase with each wave of publication, but each installment related its subject at a faster tempo than the one before. There are minute signs in the final volumes that Gibbon was working at breakneck speed.

Needless to say, the *Decline* was written and researched over more than the fifteen years that Gibbon ascribed to the project’s execution—or even to the two extra years that he described as “preparatory” to it or a preliminary seven years that had led him from “hope” to “design”

¹ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (London, 1994), 3 vols., 2:935 n. 8. Whenever possible, subsequent references to the *Decline* will be included in the text.

to “execution”.² The *Decline*’s erudition represents an immense achievement of wide reading, sensitivity to details, memory, patience and incisive judgment. Although Gibbon may not have provided the template for all future historians, he surely gave one of the greatest demonstrations we know of how research could energize intellectual power. Yet it all had its roots in the devouring curiosity of a child, a boyish taste for a traditional vein of historiographical expression called “universal history”, and a kind of jigsaw puzzle passion for questions of chronology that involved fitting Biblical and secular into the same narrative.³ Even as a boy his scope was such that he not only read the classics of western antiquity; he also wandered into the oriental writings that pre- and postdated them, and provided them with frames of reference—to the point that sometimes it could seem the West was providing context for the Orient! What is more, to understand the ancient world he instinctively called upon the moderns, immersing himself in the literature of antiquarian commentary and the erudite chronologies of European scholars from the 17th and 18th centuries.

In the midst of all these complex temporalities and scales of focus, it is curious that Gibbon felt he could pinpoint the moment in time when the subject of the *Decline* originated. So he ends the great work by recalling how, as it were, his book had happened. Here is the final volume’s final sentence, published in 1788:

It was among the ruins of the Capitol, that I first conceived the idea of a work which has amused and exercised near twenty years of my life, and which, however inadequate to my own wishes, I finally deliver to the curiosity and candour of the Public (3:1085).

The reader’s first reaction, in closing the *Decline*, may be to turn away from the twelve hundred years just recounted, and to marvel that twenty could produce so much.

The *Decline*’s end was not only its beginning, with the book spiraling back upon itself, or emitting that condensed quantum of time. The project

² Edward Gibbon, *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Murray (London, 1896), p. 285 and p. 411 respectively.

³ Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History. Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, 1998), pp. 211–216. As Sir Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World* (1614) and Bossuet’s *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* (1681) were key texts in the genre of universal history, it seems almost logical that two texts of Bossuet’s “atcheived [Gibbon’s] conversion” to Catholicism at age sixteen, and that a few years later one of his first serious (though short-lived) historical projects was to write an account of Raleigh and his times. See Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 86, 193–196.

also originated in a space, the Roman Forum and more generally the City of Rome, whose limits were to be those of his undertaking. Instructive as an unfolding in urban space would have been, Gibbon realized early on that these limits were too narrow and would give rise to a “tedious repetition” of similar scenes (1:1067–1068). Instead, with only a slightly different parsing of the words, the *Decline* could have borrowed Livy’s title and called itself a narrative *ab urbe condita*, built from and away from the historic center.⁴ The *urbs* gave way to provinces and empire, though in reality Gibbon’s account would travel farther still and engage with much of the Eurasian continent, the “civilized nations” (those of Europe and China) and the steppe peoples or barbarians (1:1025).

With this geographical expansiveness in mind, the present essay will explore the idea of the *Decline* and its author in relation to space. Gibbon was a modest traveler, and much more an armchair traveler, perhaps even when he might have done otherwise.⁵ But it will be argued that his history-writing makes innovative use of space, perhaps even more than of time. To begin with, Gibbon lived in an age when it made sense to consider the increased mobility of individuals, what he called “the local, but variable, situation of the reader, or the historian” (2:523). Mobility was one sign of social as well as economic development. Accordingly, Gibbon makes great use of physical geography, even as he extrapolates from it to engage with other dimensions that were becoming increasingly significant in the modern world: new political, social and domestic spaces. We must also mention literary space, which cuts across all of the latter. Gibbon’s sense of the limitations on narrative history raised questions of style and authorship that he related to the needs and interests of a new reading public, that itself occupied a space he could describe as “English” (1:391–392) and continental. Perhaps most importantly of all, an idea of space informed his most distinctive contribution to historical method.

⁴ This was not only the plot line; it remained the *Decline*’s absolute orientation. In case the fact had escaped his readers, Gibbon recalled it in opening volume 4: “As often as I use the definitions of *beyond* the Alps, the Rhine, the Danube, &c. I generally suppose myself at Rome, and afterwards, at Constantinople; without observing whether this relative geography may agree with the local, but variable, situation of the reader, or the historian” (3:523; Gibbon’s italics). But even the center shifts!

⁵ Apparently his trip to Naples in 1765 did not take him to Herculaneum, though before and afterwards he read with interest about the discoveries made there. Nor did he travel to Scotland, despite his friendship with many of the leading writers of Edinburgh and Glasgow. And yet at unexpected moments in the *Decline*, we hear the voice of the former traveler (e.g. 2:661 n. 78, 3:1054 n. 84). He would chide himself too that ‘the narrative of my life must not degenerate into a book of travels’ (*Autobiographies*, p. 199).

Some of the *Decline's* lasting power derives from its practice of a second mode alongside narrative, a style of excursive argument that Gibbon's age often referred to with French names like *tableau* and *peinture*, that he associated with philosophy and that he recommended as a corrective, and a form of relief, from narrative accounts.

The *Decline* opens with a "spatialization" of this kind, and if readers are not surprised, it is because Gibbon's example has become so common in historiography. Its first three chapters explore something he calls "the age of the Antonines", a kind of mini "Siècle de Louis XIV". Since the Antonine Age as he defined it barely existed, the *tableau* cannot be called imprecise. It functions like an aerial view of a space abstracted from time. But those chapters are neither the only examples nor the model. To begin with, there are signs that the six volumes were meant to be read as distinct entities rather than part of a long flow of words, even when they appeared together. As for the spatialized chapters, in Volume 1 they recur in the middle and at both ends, accounting for seven of the sixteen chapters. In Volume 2 there are similar bookends, with one chapter at the start and two spatial *tableaux* at the end.⁶ In the later volumes, though the structure loosens, a number of chapters forego narrative to describe the "state" of an object or else double back to take a new angle on what has been narrated already. These chapters are neither digressions nor supplements but complementary excursions on specific themes—the history of dogma (ch. 47, 54) or law (ch. 44), the "state of the barbaric world" (ch. 42), the "state of the Eastern empire in the tenth century" (ch. 53), etc. These chapters did not relieve Gibbon of the need to narrate. If anything, his histories of spaces and states enhanced his performance as a "philosophical historian" (1:230, 329, 526, 824). They may have helped him to narrate so fully and so well,⁷ by freeing him from a dependence on time. His view of the past was accordingly multifaceted, and his methods of investigating it changed as the work progressed.⁸ He thus accommodated times

⁶ Ch. 17 describes the founding and layout of the new Rome (Constantinople), ch. 25 offers "a separate view of the five great theatres of war" facing the successors of Julian, and ch. 26 opens with forces of nature, "earthquakes" and "the pastoral manners of the Scythians, or Tartars" (1:988ff., 1023ff.).

⁷ Or to use a verb he liked, and that he associated with pleasure, "to expatiate", derived from the Latin *spatium*, space (e.g. 1:812 n. 137, 2:368 n. 23, 3:589).

⁸ P.R. Ghosh, "Gibbon's Dark Ages: Some Remarks on the Genesis of the *Decline and Fall*", *Journal of Roman Studies* (1973), pp. 1–23, argues for "Gibbon's complete abandonment of a chronological arrangement of material for volumes 5–6" (p. 3). Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 332 & n. 54 implies that chronology fails in relation to the character of the 'Barbarian' nations that come to the fore.

susceptible of being narrated chronologically, times considered as intelligible spaces in which other sorts of logic could be discerned, and times in which sequence needed to be reinvented.

As there was nothing systematic in this approach, Gibbon adapts rather than applies the coded schemes of “conjectural” or “stadial history” we associate with Adam Smith in particular (e.g. 3:448–449). His views did not provide him with historical laws that would allow him to harmonize these different methods, much less to make predictions about the future. They did allow him to do something he probably considered more feasible and important—to make empirical revisions of the present. Clearly the *Decline’s* real endpoint was not 1453 or the Italian Renaissance, but the eighteenth-century present, which could not end even with Gibbon’s return to the Forum in his final sentence. The span of his creation continued to occupy the author in the years *after* he had finished the *Decline*. Students of the Enlightenment know the scene on the Forum so well, because it reappears more memorably in the early 1790s, in Gibbon’s repeated, unfinished attempts at autobiography. Gibbon was thinking not only of his life but of the meaning of the *Decline* and of Europe in a changing world. Tellingly, what most readers know as the fateful epiphany

It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind.

was one of three slightly different renditions of the same event, and more than a few silences.⁹ In addition, the musing on the Forum overshadows scenes equally portentous. One took place on a hill in Oxford around 1752 when the enthusiastic fifteen-year-old scholar of Oriental learning walked with his tutor and “expressed an inclination to study Arabic”—that fell on deaf ears. Perhaps the idea seemed whimsical coming from a youth of gentry stock in Tory Oxford after the late Jacobite rising in 1745–6 (and prior to Clive’s victory at Plassey in 1757); Gibbon later decided it

⁹ Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 302 (Draft E, 1791). The other versions (pp. 270, 405) may be found in Drafts C and D from 1789 and 1790 respectively. All of the drafts misremember the precise temple involved, which is most unusual for Gibbon, and C places him inside the church rather than outdoors “amidst the ruins”. The journal reproduced in *Gibbon’s Journey from Geneva to Rome*, ed. Georges A. Bonnard (London, 1961), p. 235 & p. XI, describes his arrival in Rome in early October, leaves two pages blank, and then recollects December where his every thought was for works of Roman and Italian art. It may be that another notebook was lost. For Juno vs. Jupiter, see Glen Bowersock, *From Gibbon to Auden. Essays on the Classical Tradition* (New York, 2009), p. 16.

was. In any case, the very serious result was that his future access to the East would occur only through Western languages and Western history, or rather the history of the Western *and* Eastern empires.¹⁰ This was the blueprint of the *Decline*. A second scene occurred not in physical but in intellectual space (the pages of his journal) in 1763, shortly before Gibbon embarked on his Grand Tour to Italy and Rome. He had been studying in order to write a geographical account of ancient Italy, which he imagined might become a standard schoolbook and an estimable tour guide for the happy few who travelled. But gathering up his thoughts in his journal, he conceived the idea of making it “philosophical” as well.¹¹ There was to be no future for his scheme of a philosophical travel book for gentle folk—though it is amusing to compare that description to the *Decline*. As we shall see, the association of domestic space and philosophy was to remain.

These examples from Gibbon’s memoirs and journals show that his historiographic monument was built from varied elements which could hardly derive from a single moment of inspiration or understanding. The *Decline* was built over and over again, as Gibbon sought the proper manner, in a changing present and a “variable situation”, in which to express his relation to Europe’s past. In some respects, this is simply the definition of an historian, but we know that the eighteenth century gave special importance to the question of manner. Contemporaries were sensitive to the remarkable fact that the English language had been transformed at a time within recent memory, and become a vehicle for expanded exchange of opinions and ideas—what we might call modern communication.¹²

¹⁰ Apparently it was Gibbon’s oriental interests that first led him to French. See Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 78–79; 57–58, 121 and *Decline*, 3:151 n. 1; cp. 1:1033 n. 20. For the *topos* of such walks in Oxford, see David Womersley, *Gibbon and the “Watchmen of the Holy City”*. *The Historian and his Reputation 1776–1815* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 289–290.

¹¹ In 1763 the philosophy was decidedly Addisonian, combining a spectator, travel in Italy and a concern for domestic life: “Je suivrais Strabon plutôt que Pline. Dans les divisions générales et les nomenclatures, je tacherois de mettre tout l’ordre et toute la netteté dont je suis capable, mais j’envisagerois d’un œil philosophique l’intérieur de l’habitation et les habitants eux-mêmes après avoir décrit et partagé la surface”. See *Le Journal de Gibbon à Lausanne*, 17 Août 1763–19 Avril 1764, ed. Georges Bonnard (Lausanne, 1945), pp. 167–169, in Gibbon’s original French. Gibbon would already have known Hume’s far less Addisonian invocation of a “philosophical eye” in “Of the First Principles of Government” (1741): David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987, 2nd ed.), p. 32. By the end of the 1760’s, Hume had prevailed over Addison: the same image appears regularly in the *Decline* but the sense of the domestic spectator has vanished.

¹² Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 166, or as Hume put it in 1741, with a footnote to Swift: “The first polite prose we have, was writ by a man who is still alive”. See Hume, *Essays*,

Disciplines were now to be “conversible”, framed in the new idiom and able to include new classes of actors in English life. Implicitly the new reading nation was being given a crucial task, to weigh subjects previously treated as arcane and confined to an elite. We know for instance that the early philosophical career of David Hume derailed for reasons he came to associate not with weak arguments or with powerful threats to orthodoxy, but with poor “manner”! What was true of philosophy in relation to theology also applied to history and the social and political establishment. Accordingly, new kinds of discursive contracts had to be formed in eighteenth-century Britain. In the case of history, the contract was political and stylistic at once. As Gibbon recognized in a letter of 1776, “an historian is always to some extent a politician”.¹³ The contract between history and style became so entrenched that its logic could also be inverted. By the century’s end, the conveying of the past into the present in a continuous, socially coherent fashion would turn into a characterization of British government as such.¹⁴ In the 1770s, as Gibbon began the *Decline*, and repeatedly wrote and rewrote his first three chapters until he was satisfied he had hit “the middle tone” he was looking for, the stylistic challenge had not yet radicalized into the defense of government.¹⁵ It was closer to being a project of civilization.

For better or (to some of his critics) for worse, Gibbon’s style has been considered one of the most visible features of his achievement. To some extent it helped to unify a work that was, in other respects, in constant change.¹⁶ To gauge that visibility, it is useful to think of a remark Gibbon made about Voltaire in 1762: “When he treats of a distant period, he is not a man to turn over musty monkish writers to instruct himself. He follows some compilation, varnishes it over with the magick of his

pp. 91–92, p. XXXV regarding “manner” and pp. 533–537 regarding “conversible” in my next sentence. For another reflection on manner, see Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 193–195.

¹³ The original was in French: “Un historien est toujours jusqu’à un certain point, un politique”. See *The Letters of Edward Gibbon*, ed. J.E. Norton (London, 1956), 3 vols., 2:107. My translation of “politique” is barely satisfactory; “political instigator” or “thinker”, or “machievellian” would also be true to period nuances. See for instance Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 314 n. 31.

¹⁴ To Edmund Burke, the century’s and modern Europe’s end came two years after Gibbon’s final volume. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (1790; Harmondsworth, 1968), e.g. p. 119.

¹⁵ Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 308: “the middle tone between a dull Chronicle and a Rhetorical declamation”. For the political significance of this exercise for French and European history, see the references concerning France in note 39 *infra*.

¹⁶ But cp. Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 332–333.

style, and produces a most agreeable, superficial, inaccurate performance".¹⁷ Although Gibbon could not help but admire Voltaire's easy narration and deft turns of phrase, he could neither accept nor think well of them. He would always object to Voltaire's sacrifice of erudition and accuracy (e.g. 1:54 n. 87). More generally he did not himself aspire to elegant "varnish" or to reducing style to that play of surface and depth we call irony and that for many readers became Gibbon's hallmark.¹⁸ His version of "polite" prose aspired to be ample and comprehensive, and to forge a medium in which he could entertain all types of subjects and all manner of peoples, however uncouth, conflictual or barbarous, without simply rejecting them. Irony served the purposes of comprehension—in the dual sense of toleration and of cultural and geographical scope.

Gibbon was probably the most learned author to write in English in the eighteenth century, and yet there is nothing pedantic about his erudition. Comprehension and conversibility even trump philosophy. His prose focuses less on unearthing and disserting upon the real cause or causes of events, à la Montesquieu, than in fleshing out the physical, intellectual and social space of historical interactions. His lackluster pronouncement about Mahomet offers a case in point. "The genius of the Arabian prophet, the manners of his nation, and the spirit of his religion, involve the causes of the decline and fall of the Eastern empire" (3:151). Gibbon was too good a writer for such a non-statement, as he was for giving a second and third "cause" for the decline of the caliphate (3:369) without ever stipulating the first (3:346 or alternatively 352). Although there are occasional flourishes about causality in the *Decline*, Gibbon uses the word "cause" more regularly to indicate partisanship in religion or politics, often championed out of ignorance, than for the purposes of philosophical understanding. The "causes which checked the progress of the Germans" were equally effects (1:247); the "secondary causes" of Christianity's success leave the primary cause conspicuously unaddressed (1:447). And even the dramatic statement that ends volume 2 of the *Decline*, about how Valens' allowing

¹⁷ Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th, 1763*, ed. D.M. Low (London, 1929), p. 129 (sic); cp. 164. Gibbon likewise considered Hume's *History of England to the Reign of Henry VII* "Ingenious but superficial" (p. 42; his emphasis).

¹⁸ Gibbon's friend and posthumous editor, John Holroyd Lord Sheffield, helped to fashion this image by confounding Gibbon and Voltaire. See the argument and passages reproduced in Womersley, *Gibbon and the "Watchmen"*, pp. 347, 369–371, and useful bibliography on the "English Voltaire" interpretation, p. 162. Voltaire certainly influenced Gibbon in some ways, as he did Hume and Robertson. Voltaire had his surest advocate in the latter. See *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (London, 1769), 3 vols., 1:392–393.

the Goths to stay on the Roman side of the Danube was “the principal and immediate cause of the fall of the Western Empire of Rome”, appears not in the text but in a concluding footnote (1:1083 n. 136). Is this a grand assertion or a closing swat at Montesquieu, who took causes seriously¹⁹ while getting his facts wrong, and who imagined the Goths had indeed crossed the Danube? Even as this “inexcusable” error is set straight in the note, the main text concludes gravely that “the public safety” now “seemed to depend on the life and abilities of a single man”, Theodosius. That statement reminds us how cases of individual authority concerned Gibbon no less than general causes (e.g. 1:148) while also underlining the extraordinary imbalance implied when one man (or child) was responsible for “an hundred millions” (2:513). When Gibbon vaunted “the truth and simplicity of historic prose” (2:106), he was suggesting that his achievement did not consist in isolating single factors but in portraying vast scenes with multi-dimensional clarity.

There has been a long tradition, which began with Gibbon himself, of writers saying that Montesquieu (rather than Voltaire) had the preponderant influence in shaping his style as a writer and thinker.²⁰ For the purposes of the present essay, it is interesting to consider how Montesquieu’s help in thinking about the world diminished as Gibbon’s career advanced, and he sought more comprehensive visions than philosophy would seem to allow. As we shall see, one influence is economic in a broad sense and associated with Scotland for its theory and with the extension of commerce and other forces of “emulation” across the globe; another draws on a category of learning, via works by French and European geographers.²¹ From the second group Gibbon derived factual information, but also a

¹⁹ “Ce n’est pas la fortune qui domine le monde [...] Il y a des causes générales, soit morales, soit physiques, qui agissent [...] tous les accidents sont soumis à ces causes”. Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, ch. 18, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Caillois (Paris, 1951), vol. 1, p. 173. Cp. Gibbon’s barbed compliment, when he hails Montesquieu for ‘his usual ingenuity, and [...] uncommon precision’ (1:262 n.37).

²⁰ Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 142, 173.

²¹ Gibbon’s treatment of the “Manners of the Pastoral Nations” in space is characteristically critical of this aspect of the philosopher: “Montesquieu, who has used, and abused, the relations of travellers, deduces the revolutions of Asia from this important circumstance”, the absence of a temperate zone buffering warm and cold climates (1:1029 n. 11); or “Montesquieu labours to explain a difference, which has not existed, between the liberty of the Arabs, and the perpetual slavery of the Tartars” (1:1032 n. 15; also 1:1044 n. 56). Regarding geographers, by far the most prominent is Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville, who was explicitly a geographer of empires. Gibbon relied on him for his maps and studies of ancient and modern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and hailed him *inter alia* for an “incomparable map of Europe” (1:259 n. 23).

heightened sense of the way knowledge fits or does not fit in society. We see the question raised in the *Decline's* opening sentence: "In the second century of the Christian Æra, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind" (1:31). What makes this statement comprehensive rather than complacent is its sense of what limits are, and how they are both real and fragile. The empire is frozen in time and space, perfectly realized but also tenuous, isolated and potentially endangered. It is no surprise that Gibbon's first serious object in the opening paragraphs becomes Augustus' and Hadrian's resolution to define the empire's geographical and cultural limits (1:32–37). This curbing attitude marked a turning point after the republic's expansionary policies. It was also highly topical in the early 1770's as tensions mounted with the American colonies. And it would provide decisive counterpoint to the full-length project of the *Decline*, which appraised and transcended "the limits of ancient knowledge" (3:457), for instance when Russia became part of tenth-century Byzantine maps and of Eastern history.

The contemporary relevance of Gibbon's opening subject may justify several curious features of the title given to chapter 1, "The Extent and Military Force of the Empire in the Age of the Antonines". There is, to begin with, what looks like a mistake in word order. After insisting on the "moderate" practice of Augustus, Hadrian and the Antonines (1:31–32, 37–38; 47, 55), and the rare conquests that formed exceptions to their policies, chapter 1 reviews the situation of the Roman army. Only in its second half does Gibbon go on to review the geography of the Empire in some detail. But as we have just seen, the "extent" that most concerns him is the expression of absolute power, the Emperors' immoderate will, rather than the prowess and luck of "*imperatoria virtus*" (military success; 1:33 & n. 5) or the history and physical details of geography. The priority of an absolutist definition over military conquest or sociopolitical factors explains another feature of the chapter title. As mentioned earlier, "The Age of the Antonines" is neither a standard dynastic period, nor a construction that Gibbon seems to have inherited from a previous author. His period was in fact, as he noted in the 1776 Preface, "the age of Trajan and the Antonines" in 96 AD (1:1, 8–9)—which would make it the sequel to Suetonius²²—unless it is more hybrid yet, combining Augustus, Hadrian and then the Antonines proper. So great was his emphasis on the geographical contain-

²² Cp. *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome*, p. 169.

ment of the Empire that the key exception, Trajan the conqueror imitating Alexander the Great, is assimilated to the rule. And yet Gibbon's lines about Trajan read like the charting of a new map:

Yet the success of Trajan, however transient, was rapid and specious. The degenerate Parthians, broken by intestine discord, fled before his arms. He descended the river Tigris in triumph, from the mountains of Armenia to the Persian gulph. He enjoyed the honour of being the first, as he was the last, of the Roman generals, who ever navigated that remote sea. His fleets ravaged the coasts of Arabia; and Trajan vainly flattered himself that he was approaching towards the confines of India. Every day the astonished senate received the intelligence of new names and new nations, that acknowledged his sway. They were informed that the Kings of Bosphorus, Colchos, Iberia, Albania, Osrhoene (1:36)

now owed their legitimacy and existence to Rome. In all, these conquests contribute more to the Senate's bewilderment than to a political sense of new provinces (cp. 1:224, 274–275, 2:715). So Trajan's death is followed by Hadrian's return to "the general system of Augustus" (1:37). To illustrate a different relation to space, Gibbon alludes to how the life of Trajan's successor, Hadrian, was

almost a perpetual journey; and as he possessed the various talents of the soldier, the statesman, and the scholar, he gratified his curiosity in the discharge of his duty. Careless of the difference of seasons and of climates, he marched on foot, and bare-headed, over the snows of Caledonia, and the sultry plains of the Upper Egypt; nor was there a province of the empire, which, in the course of his reign, was not honoured with the presence of the monarch (1:37).

Space has become domesticated, perfectly aligned with knowledge. Where Trajan stumbled upon new worlds, Hadrian's "perpetual journey" foreshadows civil society and the Grand Tour while becoming almost forgetful of politics.²³

²³ Gibbon remarked of travelers' accounts of the East: "every preceding account is eclipsed by the magnificent description and drawings of M.M. Dawkins and Wood, who have transported into England the ruins of Palmyra and Baalbec", i.e. made them polite (3:263 n. 71; 1:317 n. 69). Compare the vigor of Harun El Rashid, who is less polite than Dawkins and Wood and less of a Renaissance man than Hadrian: "His court was adorned with luxury and science; *but*, in a reign of three-and-twenty years, Harun repeatedly visited his provinces from Chorasana to Egypt; nine times he performed the pilgrimage of Mecca; eight times he invaded the territories of the Romans; and as often as they declined the payment of the tribute, they were taught to feel that a month of depredation was more costly than a year of submission" (3:354; my italics).

The decision against expansion sets the stage for much of the first volume of the *Decline*, and its concern with the corruption of public life through the rise of a militarized principate, the further decline of the Senate, and the financial and social disruptions thereby occasioned. Not only does Gibbon's style easily accommodate the narrative of corruption: this in itself could have been his great subject. He would thereby have bolstered the Machiavellian theme of how a republic checked in its "virtuous" expansion gave rise to problematic empire and the decline of politics. But volume 1 does not leave the story on that footing. Gibbon observed of European modernity: "Our spiritual history is grown less sublime, without becoming more intelligible". In parallel with the sense of Europe's modern inability to explain its religiosity, he was hardly inclined to imagine a history that would be only military, social or political. And if the spiritual were impaired, he would have felt that the explanatory schemes connected with corruption were insufficient as well.²⁴ To produce a truly "intelligible" and encompassing study of Rome's decline and fall in a Eurasian world, it was necessary to acquire other perspectives on what happened when an attempt was made to freeze a political order in time and space, and by locking the world outside the empire into a foreign role, to secure a closed, domestic space within. This led Gibbon to supplement the narrative of corruption in significant ways. Drawing on Adam Ferguson's vision of how professional specialization and large territories had destructive effects on the spirit of social orders, chapter 6 underlines the dire sociological effects of Caracalla's decision to give citizenship, "the freedom of the city [...] to all provincials, for the purpose of taxation" (1:184–186).²⁵ What might appear as generous pragmatism or political cunning instead damaged public spirit and unleashed the military. It is following this *social* breakdown that Gibbon proceeds to philosophical analyses of three extraneous military, religious and cultural systems: the Persians, the Germans and the early Christians (chapters 8, 9 and 15–16 respectively), each of which embodies new strengths and different forms of corruption.

The singularity of this architecture deserves emphasis. It is only in subsequent volumes of the *Decline* that the two schemes of narrative—

²⁴ The extension necessary to the idea of "personality" or what I am calling the spiritual is a theme of some of J.G.A. Pocock's earliest writings about the *Decline*, e.g. "Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian," *Daedalus* 105 (1976), 153–169.

²⁵ Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 219.

temporal and philosophical—would mesh to a certain degree, and that the space of the empire would progressively be affected by the incursions, invasions or transformations brought about by the three groups. But in volume 1 they enter Gibbon's thinking as cultural or spiritual forces. He does not use those terms *per se*, but his initial descriptions of Zoroastrian theology and priestcraft, metaphysics and intolerance, on the one hand, and of the radically negative "freedom" of the Germans—from letters, arts, agriculture, refined metals, etc.—show how the threats are more than military.²⁶ In addition, these two extraneous forces of, respectively, religion and then barbarism, precede the chapters on Christianity, though the latter might have succeeded them directly. We may infer that these central chapters have a special meaning for the symmetrical bounds of Volume 1, the Antonines and the Christians. Gibbon gives them a clear identity by viewing them under the same aspect, that of the "domestic". To introduce the Persians and then the Germans, each chapter invokes the idea that these spaces are not part of the story of Rome, except that somehow they are. It then becomes important to form "a previous idea" (1:213) of their existence, which will prove of great import.

Here are the opening paragraphs of each chapter:

Whenever Tacitus indulges himself in those beautiful episodes, in which he relates some domestic transaction of the Germans or of the Parthians, his principal object is to relieve the attention of the reader from a uniform scene of vice and misery. From the reign of Augustus to the time of Alexander Severus, the enemies of Rome were in her bosom; the tyrants and the soldiers; and her prosperity had a very distant and feeble interest in the revolutions that might happen beyond the Rhine and the Euphrates (1:213; ch. 8).

The government and religion of Persia have deserved some notice from their connexion with the decline and fall of the Roman empire. [...] But the warlike Germans, who first resisted, then invaded, and at length overturned, the Western monarchy of Rome, will occupy a much more important place in this history, and possess a stronger, and, if we may use the expression, a more domestic, claim to our attention and regard. The most civilized nations of modern Europe issued from the woods of Germany, and in the rude institutions of those barbarians we may still distinguish the original principles of our present laws and manners (1:230; ch. 9).

²⁶ In tandem with the Germans' "languid" imagination and souls, there is a leitmotif in Gibbon's account of their barbarian "spirit", e.g. 1:235, 237–238, 240, 242, which may also owe something to Ferguson.

The two successive chapters tell a story that is domestic, and then more domestic yet, about what would come of Rome's identity as a closed world. The emergence of Christianity in chapters 15 and 16 would carry the same story still farther. But is this more than a verbal touch? Why might Gibbon associate these chapters with the domestic? At least three reasons come to mind. First, he thereby signifies that the narrative of public corruption and even its ordinary parameters are being transcended. Accordingly, what follows is neither historicist nor even "historic" in an ordinary sense. As we shall see, Gibbon insisted on the narrowness of historical writing in his time; this appeal to foreignness was his way of signifying an enlargement. The second reason for the theme of the domestic is deeply political. These are forces that were to redefine the relation of public and private within the "Roman world and city" (3:414). The third reason builds on the first two: to continue with the metaphor of forces, we might say that Gibbon will renounce both centrifugal expansion and centripetal invasion or implosion as vectors of historical movement. The domestic will have to be related to the sheer extension of space and the possibilities of movement in it. Here again we are encountering a project of civilization that involved "arts and learning as well as [...] arms" (1:446). Gibbon approaches this prudently. In their way the two chapters are a mirror for modern Europe, comparable to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*.²⁷

To translate back into style in the larger sense in which we are beginning to view it, we might say that what Hume understood as philosophy's need for "manner", Gibbon came to understand as the need for a new kind or kinds of history. However, his career was hardly less serendipitous than Hume's, who went from philosopher to political and economic essayist and finally to historian. One suspects that history was only a form of expression for Hume, an interpretation of the problem rather than its solution, whereas Gibbon's experience of becoming the historian of all six volumes of the *Decline* was intended as his comprehensive answer to the problem of how to read the present. (The *Autobiographies*, in the plural, suggest it was not.) But to stay with history, although it is interesting to assess how the *Decline* may or may not still be valid on particular facets of ancient, medieval or Renaissance history, we must be careful not to assess it simply from the vantage of our established discipline, and a codified, less esteemed sub-discipline, historiography, as both are practiced today. As we have begun to see, the *Decline* was a work informed by the intel-

²⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, 1999–2010), 5 vols., 4:23–24.

lectual and literary scene in which it came into being, and these involved Gibbon in inventing but also reinventing a practice of history. It became his task as a modern to rewrite the history told by a broad range of ancient worlds, and his task as an Englishman to rewrite or domesticate the kind of history written by the Scots.

Gibbon retained his interest in establishing chronology, but the mature intellect who set about designing his work in the late 1760s realized that dates could not make history a science. On the one hand, reconciling the narratives advocated by theologians and confessional groups was of diminishing importance (however controversial), and their "spiritual" dimension was no longer compelling in otherworldly terms (3:85). Narratives from pagan antiquity, especially in their account of early periods, were equally subject to doubt and debate. On the other, Gibbon had come to understand that even as a formal tool, chronology was incapable even of providing a backbone for "historic prose". As he observed on the opening page of the second volume of the *Decline* in 1781, on the founding of Constantinople: "The age of the great Constantine and his son is filled with important events. The historian must be oppressed by their number and variety, unless he diligently separates from each other the scenes which are connected only by the order of time" (1:585). A narrative could simply not be founded on "the order of time" if it was to make for intelligible history. This odd statement is another way of describing the fact that England in Gibbon's time was a country where the practice of a collective secular narrative was still only crudely developed.²⁸

That sense of crudeness was exacerbated by the fact that English readers had crowned the Scottish performances in history-writing of Hume and William Robertson and, closer to home, the rise and triumphal ascent of a different narrative possibility that foregrounded individual experience in secular society. The success of the novel and its domestic appeal obviously colored the perception of historical narrative in England. For instance, Gibbon observed of the childhood reading that was so important in his development:

²⁸ At the end of his life, perhaps in light of the changes to the historiographic scene in Britain, he felt he could change his mind. Writing of Leibniz's ability to argue for opinions over facts, he observed: "Nor can the order of time, that infallible touchstone of truth, be reconciled with the hypothesis of Leibnitz". See Gibbon, "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick" in *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq.*, ed. John, Lord Sheffield (London, 1837), pp. 790–791.

From the ancient I leapt to the modern World; many crude lumps of Speed, Rapin, Mezery, Davila, Machiavel, Father Paul, Bower, etc., passed through me like so many novels, and I swallowed with the same voracious appetite descriptions of India and China, of Mexico and Peru. [...] My father's friends who visited the boy were astonished at finding him surrounded with a heap of folios, of whose titles *they* were ignorant, and on whose contents *he* could pertinently discourse.²⁹

The boy's interest in these historians from the Renaissance up almost to the present was not in the fictional, but not exactly in the factual either. Their subjects were English, French, Italian and church history—even if we discount the geographic “descriptions”, his readings had no common thread—and Gibbon suggests that the result of his reading was less hard knowledge than social “discourse”. (One notes that Machiavelli is lumped with the others rather than read covertly as a dangerous author whose thought immediately dictated a context of understanding.) All of these readings were done in English, which would have reinforced Gibbon's sense of his conversibility with those around him, who may have known very little of what he was reading but who apparently recognized it as touching on “pertinent” themes. Gibbon's world was not simply one of intellectual argument, abstract ideas. Those “polite” conditions continued to obtain when he had become a polyglot, learned author. As a young man he would still claim that a sense of literary immediacy was required for good historical writing. Even if certain forms of statement were not susceptible to narrative form, their presence gave deeper insights into historical process than more conventional elements could. In his earliest publication, written in French, he contrasted the abilities of Livy and Tacitus in a graphic way: “Je gravis sur les Alpes avec Hannibal, mais j'assiste au conseil de Tibere”.³⁰ Events viewed externally were the stuff of history and pageant, whereas the arcana could not be rendered in the same way. They required a more intimate, domestic approach that Gibbon considered a higher art. As we have seen, he later associated that inner space with the “philosophical historian”.

In roughly the same years that Gibbon was formulating the virtues of immediacy and a certain intimacy in narrative, Adam Smith was referring in his Edinburgh lectures to public demand for contact in one form or

²⁹ Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 57, 121; also 393 (Gibbon's emphases).

³⁰ Edward Gibbon, *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, ed. Robert Mankin (1761; Oxford, 2010), ch. LII, p. 126 (“I labour up the Alps with Hannibal, but I am present at Tiberius' council”; my translation).

another with the past. Smith noted, "Historicall truths are now in much greater request than they ever were in the ancient times".³¹ But Smith was worried by a contradiction: the heightened demand was often related to political and religious questions that led not to the creation of narrative but to "long demonstrations" that "interrupt the thread of the narration" and weaken it. Immediacy and style may have been foils against this problem, but at the same time a philosophical historian could hardly escape it, especially in England. An explicit and well-known part of how Gibbon came to write about ancient Rome involves his alarm about factions in English public life, an alarm he shared with Hume, and one that discouraged him from taking on a national subject.³² Organized opinion groups then appeared to be exercising something close to censorship, limiting the possibilities of debate, in a country where free speech was claimed as a proud right. The rise of a certain form of reading public was thus close to being a national danger. And even if one took a more moderate view, it may not have been clear what "the" public wanted in the way of discourse and where it was to be found—as an extension in one form or other of outdoors (extra-parliamentary) political discussion in the coffee houses, in spaces of more focused debate (e.g. in the periodical literature) or in a new form of interiorized narrative understanding. In short, considerable ambiguities attended the new demand for history and they were echoed in the creation of the *Decline*.

We noted earlier that the 1776 Preface began by expressing Gibbon's intention to carry out only a part of his vast project. This was more than modesty. He so apprehended his reception in 1776 that he privately arranged with his publisher for a relatively small first edition, so that he could immediately adjust the work to the public taste.³³ As it happened,

³¹ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 102. The remark was written down in 1763 but may have been part of Smith's lectures on rhetoric as early as 1748, two years after he left Oxford to return to Scotland.

³² Gibbon generally rewrote from scratch. But in recounting his life, he saw fit to copy over pages from his 1762 journal—as if they were historical documents—regarding his search for a subject that would alleviate the problem of factions. "I should shrink with terror from the modern history of England, where every character is a problem and every reader a friend or an enemy; where a writer is supposed to hoist a flag of party, and is devoted to damnation by the adverse faction" (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 196). See Hume, *Essays*, pp. XXXVI–XXXVIII, XLI, for a British perception of the problem.

³³ His idea was that a second edition would thus be able to take instant account of the public reaction (and his own second thoughts) through revisions—as if history were less an objective, than a reader-sensitive, *social science*! However, as Gibbon reported in French in a letter, on the hunch that "l'ouvrage en question pourroit bien valoir quelque

the *Decline* quickly became (in Hume's words) "popular", what we might call a bestseller. Gibbon found no better way to express that success, in writing to a Swiss friend, than to observe: "l'histoire ancienne de votre savant ami a réussi comme le Roman du jour".³⁴ The metaphor was a shade disparaging if one thinks of history as a dignified form of discourse that aims to move from ephemera to monumentality; the *Decline* was not literature in our sense of the word. But history had as yet too little of an identity, especially in England. Many of the same criteria applied to literature as well, often confusingly, in an expanding world of print. In any case, Gibbon's apprehensions about the reception of the *Decline*, and his own understanding of what kinds of history the public would accept, gradually relaxed. He engaged in controversy about religious subjects in the years after 1776 and published his *Vindication* in 1779, which led to further controversy. In the 1781 postscript to the Preface, he announced that having brought the narrative down to the fall of the Western Empire in 476 AD, he had "abundantly discharge[d his] engagements with the Public". However, if the latter were ready to buy, read and discuss, "perhaps" he might continue . . . Exactly one year later, a new addition to the postscript updated his intentions, announcing that he would (1:3–4).³⁵

chose" (the work in question might be worth something), the publishers convinced him to increase the print run in mid-production. *The Letters of Edward Gibbon*, 2:105–107.

³⁴ I.e., the ancient history of your scholarly friend has succeeded like the Novel of the day. *Letters of Edward Gibbon*, 2:106. The remark was prompted, in part, by the lines immediately preceding, when Gibbon observed that women were reading and talking about the *Decline*. Gibbon reports his publisher Thomas Cadell as using a different metaphor, that again highlighted ephemerality: the *Decline* "s'est vendu [...] comme une brochure de six sous sur les affaires du tems", i.e. was selling like a penny pamphlet on current affairs. Hume's remark was made to William Strahan in contrasting the *Decline* to Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, another marketing success of 1776: "Dr Smith's Performance is another excellent Work that has come from your Press this Winter; but I have ventured to tell him, that it requires too much thought to be as popular as Mr Gibbon's". *Letters of David Hume*, 2:314. (Tellingly, Hume made no distinction of genres: it was the different manners that concerned him.) Strahan's reply says much about the unknown character of the public: the *Decline* "is the more popular work; but the sale of [*Wealth of Nations*], though not near so rapid, has been more than I could have expected from a work that requires much thought and reflection (qualities that do not much abound among modern readers) to peruse to any purpose". See Adam Smith, *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 193 n.

³⁵ Gibbon's *A Vindication of some passages in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is usefully included in Womersley's edition of the *Decline*, 3:1106–1184. As if he did not mind polemical notoriety so long as the *Decline* stood above it, Gibbon had the *Vindication* published in octavo rather than quarto, a fact noted in *Autobiographies*, p. 316 n. 34.

The political, philosophical and lexical constraints on the word “history”³⁶ in England may help to explain how the *Decline* could appear reductive, and again almost disparaging, about history in our acception. Gibbon announces early on (ch. 3), no doubt programmatically, that the reign of Antoninus Pius “is marked by the rare advantage of furnishing very few materials for history; which is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind” (1:102). Gibbon will seem to embrace this eighteenth-century commonplace about the content of history³⁷—and thus have little more to say about Pius. But there were other options. What I have called the narrative of corruption brutally emerges as a return to history. After the first three chapters provide their synoptic view of the Antonine age, the very first theme broached in chapter 4 is “The cruelty, follies and murder of Commodus” (1:108), which indicates by the irony of the shift from subjective to objective genitive that we are now in a closed world of destructive energies. Gibbon was also familiar with Hume’s way of repositioning the commonplace, making a sharp choice between barbaric repetition, the “adventures” and “fables” of early nations, or else civilized “history” with real content.³⁸ Gibbon’s tack was instead to deepen his reader’s sense of what the “little more” in history may be. The sociological underpinnings of the commonplace are neatly exposed at the end of chapter 9, after his synoptic account of the Germans, when Gibbon takes a different slant on barbarism:

Wars, and the administration of public affairs, are the principal subjects of history; but the number of persons interested in these busy scenes, is very different, according to the different condition of mankind. In great monarchies, millions of obedient subjects pursue their useful occupations in peace and obscurity. The attention of the Writer, as well as of the Reader, is solely confined to a court, a capital, a regular army, and the districts which happen

³⁶ Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755, 2nd ed.) defines “history” as “A narration of events and facts delivered with dignity. Narration; relation. The knowledge of facts and events”. “Story” is more chequered: “History; account of things past. Small tale; petty narrative; account of a single incident. An idling or trifling tale; a petty fiction”. It is an important proof of its comprehensive style that the *Decline* encompasses all of the definitions of “story”.

³⁷ Dr Johnson can be invoked for a politer version: “We must consider how very little history there is; I mean real authentick history. That certain Kings reigned, and certain battles were fought, we can depend upon as true; but all the colouring, all the philosophy, of history is conjecture”. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birbeck Hill, rev. L.F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), 6 vols., 2:365–6. For history as willy-nilly a form of literature, idem, 2:236–7.

³⁸ David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688* (1754–62; London, 1778), 8 vols., 1:1–3.

to be the occasional scene of military operations. But a state of freedom and barbarism, the season of civil commotions, or the situation of petty republics, raises almost every member of the community into action, and consequently into notice (1:252; also 1:237).

Whatever its reality, the modern print world also aspired to be a unified space, where all lives were increasingly and almost equally socialized, if not politically equal. History could then seem to be about so little because society was about so much, and because it functioned so well. The masses, whose activities were specialized, were busy, happy and driven by specific forms of curiosity about the court or the exploits of a standing army, which retained their traditional roles as foci of change and imagination. But as we saw with Smith, “the Writer” or historian knows there is more to the story. Gibbon entertains the idea that to improve our understanding of history and (for instance) the public role of the individual, political freedom within large, polite societies needed to be reconnected to the rougher freedom of barbarians and republicans. Ironically it may even be in this way that he could make sense of the growing prominence of historiographical achievement in Scotland, where Hume and Robertson had overcome another commonplace of the times that held that polite England (and *therefore* Great Britain) had as yet produced no significant works of history.³⁹

Typically, however, the paragraph we have been considering goes on to relativize its claim about the intrinsic value of individuals in making history. We assess the importance of the barbarians and the ancient republics on the basis of their epic accounts of themselves, rather than their real numbers, which amounts to another kind of magic: “The irregular divisions, and the restless motions of the people of Germany, dazzle our imagination, and seem to multiply their numbers. The profuse enumeration of kings and warriors, of armies and nations, inclines us to forget that the same objects are continually repeated” (1:252). In all, Gibbon may be

³⁹ “The old reproach, that no British altars had been raised to the muse of history, was recently disproved by the first performances of Robertson and Hume” (dating back to 1759 and 1754 respectively) appears in Draft B of Gibbon’s memoirs, as does the reference to the 1745–1746 Jacobite rebellion as the “disgraceful [...] progress [...] of some naked highlanders” into England (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 166, 180; also *Decline*, 1:34). It is a crucial fact that after finishing the *Decline*, and after 1789, Gibbon revived the reproach about history in order to turn it against France (pp. 278, 408; 314–315), thereby refusing both *philosophes* (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Mably, Raynal, etc.) and erudite academicians the badge of historians.

seen as a pedagogue instructing his modern, socialized “Reader” in the way one’s place in a socialized present colors one’s view of the past. Thus, when he writes a few pages later (ch. 10) of the Persian king Sapor, that “the voice of history, which is often little more than the organ of hatred or flattery, reproaches Sapor with a proud abuse of the rights of conquest” (1:286), the reader is quickly apprised⁴⁰ that the authority of “the voice of history” should never be taken for granted. Authority and truth are both problems. *Real* understanding may not always be possible in history, but *better* understanding comes by examining the received account through discussion and making incremental (that “little more”) improvements on it. Here we have an empirical dimension of Gibbon’s method, which may be further characterized by the use of another comparative at the end of chapter 1, when he refuses a patriotic Roman view of the world because “the temper, as well as knowledge, of a modern historian, require a more sober and accurate language” (1:55).

The incremental gains of an empirical science and the parameter of accuracy do not obviously serve the same goal (e.g. 1:265 n. 46). “Accuracy” implies precision about facts and judgments, and as such it is regularly hailed in the pages of the *Decline*. But it is striking that in Gibbon’s prose, for reasons of more than euphony, the word is often linked to something else. Precision is not all. The provision for sobriety in the last citation means the historian must avoid becoming a partisan. His challenge is to speak as if constantly at Rome without, as it were, taking sides with the Romans. He must avoid giving the impression that his work is essentially a rhetorical performance, the kind that might be associated with panegyrics, coded forms of discourse close to the seats of civil or religious power, or enthusiastic accounts. Gibbon studies such discourses in his interpretation of Rome and rejects the idea that their testimony can be taken at face value. That much is banal. What makes Gibbon a more interesting historian is his rejection of the idea that such documents *cannot* in other ways be taken at face value (e.g. 1:643). The art of the historian consists in various abilities. As the following examples suggest, he must have a capacity to read sources as sources while retaining the freedom to doubt them, to keep in mind that rational facts and historical facts may be separate classes of information, and to recognize that precision can be insular:

⁴⁰ Gibbon relates Sapor’s barbaric, taxidermic treatment of the corpse of his enemy, the Roman emperor Valentinian—and then discounts it as improbable.

Le Clerc, in a short life of Cyprian [...] has laid him open with great freedom and accuracy. (1:487 n.)

[Murtadi's account of] local traditions have a strong air of truth and accuracy (3:279 n. 104).

This translation is stamped with the Chinese character of domestic accuracy and foreign ignorance (3:794 n. 8).

These are only examples of a larger vision of the historian's method. However, we will again project Gibbon too easily into a world of (historical) science if we discount the influence of society on his work. Perhaps he too had confused global expansion with knowledge. In 1790 or 1791, two or three years after the last volumes were published, he questioned his own confidence about possessing "a sober and temperate language" for depicting the world. After censuring the Romans for their sense of world domination, the historian felt he too had succumbed to a similar temptation. Thus he came to look skeptically on his own readiness to speak about the effect of Rome's decline on the destiny of "the world". Regretting that he had asserted on his first page that the "decline and fall" of Rome was "a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth", he thought to limit the effects to "our own and the neighbouring countries of Europe" (1:31, 3:1094). This need to be more "sober and accurate" in relation to geography also recalls Augustus' and Hadrian's "moderation", the *Decline's* opening gesture. It brings us back to the question of England and Europe.

When Smith lectured to his Scottish students about the public demand for "historicall truths", he was probably thinking of a social and literary space called Britain. When Hume magnified Smith's observation in writing to his Scottish publisher in London in 1770, "I believe this is the historical Age and this the historical Nation", by the latter he clearly meant Scotland, whether the Scots were in the Lowlands or in London.⁴¹ "The historical Age" is less clear: Hume may not have wished to dwell on the fact that the market for historical writing consisted in large part of an English reading public with political preoccupations he often found sinister, along with an appetite for narrative. In contrast, Gibbon clearly recognized the importance of "the historical Nation". As the sales and prestige of Hume and Robertson were proving, history in the 1770s could be considered as a form in which the public appetite and the print market for narrative

⁴¹ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), 2 vols., 2:230. He may not have meant the Highlands.

met the public expression of politics.⁴² Years later, he would describe his situation as an author in a memorable sentence: “I have never presumed to accept a place in the triumvirate of British historians”.⁴³ Though his homage was doubtlessly sincere, Gibbon’s deference to the two Scots is complex. Hume too had qualms about a British identity and like Robertson, he eschewed writing British history per se. As mentioned earlier, Scotland had launched the writing of history in English, but not exactly for England, nor even for Britain as it then existed. Gibbon was of course no Scot, nor was he a Briton or even a South Briton (2:495, 1:998). In fact, the only time he expressly describes himself in the *Decline*, the passage reads like a patriotic salute to England.

But I shall ever glory in the name and character of an Englishman: I am proud of my birth in a free and enlightened country; and the approbation of that country is the best and most honourable reward of my labours (2:520).

Gibbon was claiming his country at a particular moment, not so much in its history as in his private life. In the preface opening the fourth volume of the *Decline* in 1788, Gibbon steps out of his professional role as historian and author to allude to his emigration in 1783 to Switzerland (2:520). Even so, things were characteristically complex. He was writing his preface in London and bidding adieu to England during a trip back to read proofs, after which he would return “home” to Lausanne.

Gibbon’s departure to Lausanne eased some of the strains of Britishness and redefined his authority. He was no longer someone who wrote in relation to the fashions and controversies of England, or who was trying in some narrow sense to domesticate Scottish historical writing south of the Tweed. He grew closer to one of the conventional personae of the historian, which all favored a degree of social detachment—clergyman, tutor to a prince or a noble, retired politician or citizen in exile.⁴⁴ But Gibbon’s movement in physical space was also a return as well as a departure. Since in most countries of Western Europe, religion and space coincided by law,

⁴² This description in some ways completes Arnaldo Momigliano’s perception that Gibbon’s achievement consisted in “blending in himself the philosopher and the antiquarian” or providing a “synthesis of the philosopher and of the antiquarian.” See “Gibbon’s Contribution to Historical Method” in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), pp. 195–211 (199, 207).

⁴³ Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 311–312.

⁴⁴ Ronald Syme, “How Gibbon Came to History” in *Gibbon et Rome à la lumière de l’historiographie moderne*, ed. Pierre Ducrey (Geneva, 1977), p. 49. The innovation of Hume and Robertson was, in a sense, to propose the Scot as another persona.

Gibbon had already suffered exclusion from Oxford University and from public life in England when he converted to Roman Catholicism at the age of sixteen. This resulted in his having had a first, protracted experience of Lausanne in “early youth” (2:520), to just short of twenty-one. During the five years he spent there he came to possess not only a foreign language, French, and the culture of a periphery, but also the sophisticated culture of the capital of the Francophone world, Paris. The *Decline* was to make rich use of French academic scholarship from the 18th century.

One of Gibbon's singularities was thus to have been a provincial in the French world and awkwardly metropolitan in the British,⁴⁵ with the choice of finding his way as an historian in either of two polite vernaculars. Hume played a guiding role in the 1760s on the language question, by discouraging Gibbon from following his instinct and pursuing a career in French. Hume argued that the changing demographics of Western Europe would favor English. As markets and sales were not Gibbon's chief concern, it is hard to say exactly why he accepted the advice. His respect for Hume surely played an important role, and so would the prospect of engaging actively in the geopolitics of Europe. French may not yet have begun to lose its cultural hegemony in Europe, but Gibbon's perception was that the countries of Europe had achieved a large measure of equality and a robust civility, even as English was gaining strength on a global scale.⁴⁶ Thus, Lausanne was where his intellectual career first prompted him into print (in French) and then by a different logic, where the *Decline* came to a triumphant end (in English; 3:1085).⁴⁷ Here again the end could seem the beginning.

⁴⁵ He read the histories of Hume and Robertson upon his first return to England from Lausanne in February 1759, and was powerfully impressed. Those readings may have produced a shock, if not an epiphany, in part because he understood their provinciality inside and out. Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th, 1763*, ed. D.M. Low (London, 1929), p. 9.

⁴⁶ Robert Mankin, “Electricity and static: Benjamin Franklin and his British compatriots”. <http://transatlantica.revues.org/4654>. For the idea of civility, see *Decline* 2:512–515, 3:412; the first of these passages dates from the early 1770s. Whatever we may think of polite or scientific war, for Gibbon the robustness had much to do with forms of rationality, e.g. “The science of war, that constituted the more rational force of Greece and Rome, as it now does of Europe, never made any considerable progress in the East” (1:228; 1:446, 3:411–412). See also “The conquests of our language and literature are not confined to Europe alone; and the writer who succeeds in London is speedily read on the banks of the Delaware and the Ganges” (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 339).

⁴⁷ For the French beginning, see Gibbon, *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, p. 157. The *Essai* was published in London in 1761. For the English ending, see also Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 333–334, 339.

The town of 7,000 people was an affordable, small oasis, and the *pays de Vaud* “a small district [...] much more distinguished for politeness than for industry” (1:239 n. 36). His attachment to Lausanne was deep and sincere, but it was also geographical and utilitarian. Just as he certainly cared a great deal about “the approbation of *that* country”, England, Gibbon also had his sights set on something larger than mere retirement in Lausanne. He had urged the translation of the *Decline* into French since 1776.⁴⁸ Even as the subject of the volumes and then its author continued to move eastward in space, Gibbon had hoped to have his work circulating among a European readership. If Lausanne was a center, it was not as a publishing hub. It was more like a convenient overlook from which to survey countries where he could not live so comfortably—modern France, Italy and Britain, not to mention their large cities—and also the east of Europe as it turned into Asia Minor (1:52), Central Asia and the Middle East.⁴⁹ In that sense, it is tempting to say that the space Gibbon aspired to inhabit most of all was that of “the European republic” (3:470).

This Europe was not the product of tensions between a center in Paris (or if we add London, centers) and peripheries according to contemporary schemes of national politics and the balance of power. Before and after Roman history first started to his mind, there were signs that Italy and Italian history was the setting from which his career had to begin—as if the essential problems of European modernity were still Italian over a thousand years after the invasion of Rome by the Goths and 900 years after “the three great nations of the world, the Greeks, the Saracens, and the Franks, encountered each other on the theatre of Italy” (3:471). Pietro Giannone’s *Storia civile del regno di Napoli* (1723) is probably the most cited work by a modern in Gibbon’s commonplace book from his youth in Lausanne though it is never mentioned in his *Essai*. Several years later, among his ideas for a faction-proof historical project were the French invasion of Italy under Charles VIII and the history of a different Italian

⁴⁸ *The Letters of Edward Gibbon*, 2:108. It might be said that Gibbon was forgetting Hume’s advice but following his (and Robertson’s) examples. Both historians were translated into French before Gibbon had begun to write the *Decline*. Gibbon preferred the translation of the *Decline* into Italian and thought on hearsay that the German edition was better still (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 339).

⁴⁹ See 1:35 and 3:199 n. 127 for notations on one limit of the modern world. On Lausanne as an oasis, see 1:239 n. 36 and Patricia Craddock, *Edward Gibbon, Luminous Historian, 1772–1794* (Baltimore, 1989), p. 266. Gibbon was sensitive to the rising expense of city life in London and elsewhere. As he noted in regard to his Grand Tour of 1763, “Between the expensive style of Paris and of Italy it was prudent to interpose some months of tranquil simplicity” in Lausanne (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 205).

city, Florence under the Medicis.⁵⁰ We have already alluded to one of his next undertakings, the Italian geography. But these would all be unimportant in Gibbon's development were it not for later judgments, such as his assertion in the penultimate chapter of the *Decline* that Italian Renaissance historians had been seminal in developing an understanding of "the transactions of Italy, and even of Europe". This claim emerges when Gibbon describes the schism and torments surrounding the papacy's return to Rome from Avignon (1378–1418), the emergence of England as a force in European (ecclesiastical) politics, and the papacy's achievement of "absolute dominion" over Rome in 1500 (3:1042–1061; here 1056–1057). Gibbon refers to the "the temporal sovereignty of the Roman pontiffs" as "a theme which has been adorned by the pens of the noblest historians of the times", and appends the following note:

More especially by Guicciardini and Machiavel, in the general history of the former, in the Florentine history, the Prince, and the political discourses of the latter. These, with their worthy successors Fra-Paolo and Davila, were justly esteemed the first historians of modern languages, till, in the present age, Scotland arose, to dispute the prize with Italy herself (3:1056–1057, n. 89).

We encountered Machiavelli and Sarpi ("Father Paul") as book talk earlier, in relation to the novel, and we have seen too how it may not be plausible to take these lines as a burst of British self-satisfaction from an expatriate Englishman. Gibbon's observation is explicitly about "modern" historiography and its relation to European self-understanding. In describing the means used to reduce "the great schism of the West", he had evoked the Council of Constance from 1414 to 1418, remarking (and perhaps half quipping) that "the number and weight of civil and ecclesiastical members might seem to constitute the states general of Europe" (3:1050). Shortly after describing how the Vatican secures its dominion over Rome, he notes that "the monarchs of France, Germany, and Spain, contended with gigantic arms for the dominion of Italy" (3:1057). But faced with these events on a European scale, we here find him insisting that, for a very long time, the only minds capable of measuring their consequences were four Italians who wrote up to one hundred years after the events.

The claim is surprising, if only because the northern Renaissance is left aside regarding events of such general concern. What is more, "the first

⁵⁰ Edward Gibbon, 'Common Place Book'. British Library, London. ADD MS 4886o. For Florence, see *Autobiographies*, pp. 193–194, 197. Of the Florentine project he asked a question that applied in each detail to the *Decline* as well: "On this splendid subject I shall most probably fix; but *when*, or *where*, or *how* will it be executed?" (his italics).

historians" were not necessarily historians according to standard eighteenth-century categories: The *Prince* was a book of ill repute or, going beyond that, of philosophical counsel, whereas the *Discourses* analyze and generalize from themes in Livy and other Roman historians, along with contemporary events in Italy.⁵¹ Gibbon places this enlarged, hybrid and unscientific notion of history at the very start of early modern historiography, as if to ground it in a certain conception of politics. The result was not the take-off of a new model of writing. For a very long time the two Florentines are said to have had only two "worthy successors". The whole of Europe instead remained under the influence of the Machiavellian-Guicciardian vision,⁵² or else continuing to study the historical subjects they identified as relevant or simply shunning their ideas as dangerous. Presumably it was by having treated further aspects of these civil, legal and political questions, and expanding the range without changing the interpretative framework given for European history, that the historians of the Council of Trent (Sarpi) and of the civil wars of France (Davila) deserve mention. This view of the four authors amounts to a paraphrase of the fact that the word "first" changes meanings rather jarringly in Gibbon's note ('were justly esteemed the first historians of modern languages, till, in the present age' . . .), shifting from a chronological to a qualitative sense. This effect is confirmed when "Scotland" emerges as a force in historiography. One suspects it was Gibbon's intention to blend the two meanings of "first", so that Italy was the founder of the modern European mind when Scotland too became—the founder, over two hundred years later. A series of questions immediately arise. How exactly did "Scotland" renew the Italian framework? What significance should be ascribed to this play with narrative order? And what was Gibbon's relation to these firsts?

The note does not stipulate which Scots Gibbon had in mind, but the following pages of the *Decline* identify them. There are patent thematic

⁵¹ The *Encyclopédie* for instance places "Machiavelisme" in the category "Histoire de la philosophie"; Hume, *Essays*, p. 567, tried to split him in two. However, in the "Catalogue de Livres de la Bibliothèque de Monsieur Gibbon. Fait à Lausanne le 26 septembre 1785", now in the Morgan Library of New York, Gibbon placed Machiavelli and also Grotius in the section "Histoire, et Géographie", subsection "Histoire de l'Europe" rather than in the section "Sciences", subsection "Droit, et Politique", where he placed Montesquieu.

⁵² Especially if we replace "vision" by an idea of paradigm, one will think immediately of J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1975). To my knowledge, the note from the *Decline* is never referred to, either there or in Pocock's numerous studies of Gibbon, and yet it provides the context for Gibbon's version of a narrative "between Machiavelli and Hume". In addition, Gibbon continued to take seriously an Erasmian or Catholic critique of the church (3:438).

connections between the Popes' dominion and Robertson's *History of the Reign of Charles V* (1769), to which Gibbon goes on to allude (n. 90 & 2:208, n. 116). Gibbon likewise refers to Hume's *History of England*, as one would expect. But as with the Florentines, a broadening of historiographical horizons is underway. Hume may already have been anticipated when Gibbon qualified Machiavelli's *Discorsi* as "political discourses", the title Hume gave to his economic essays of 1752. And even before citing Hume's *History*, Gibbon had invoked Adam Smith's "[*Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the*] *Wealth of Nations*" (1776) (3:1058 n. 92–93; also 3:1047 n. 69), a work of reflection that employs historical examples. In short, "the first historians" of Scotland too are a varied group that cannot be defined simply by geography—there is no mention, for instance, of Adam Ferguson—or the practice of narrative history.

How can we make sense of (northern) Italy and (Lowland) Scotland as the decisive fashioners of the modern European mind? It is tempting to describe the two founding moments as, first, the self-conscious emergence in modern history of politics and States as separate from a religious framework, precisely at the time religious authority attempted to establish itself as a temporal force in European societies; second, the self-conscious emergence in modern history of a discourse concerning economic improvement as separate from a political framework, precisely at the time statecraft attempted to establish itself as the dominant, if not the only, force in European societies. This interpretation is highly schematic but it suggests how "Scotland" denotes a key moment in European thought in keeping with the theme of the present book. For Gibbon, the Scots enlightened modern historiography, not so much by the use of new methods, as by deepening the understanding of its existing structure. What we call the Scottish Enlightenment was brought about by the Scots rewriting the Italian Renaissance for the purposes of European (and not simply British) modernity. The affirmation of the political thus leads to narratives of improvement that were, in theory, far from ancient or modern accounts of the "crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind". Those narratives probably had little in common with the Italian projects forged by the young English historian looking for his grand subject. But years later, they gave rise to what we might call a third stage in European self-consciousness, that relates specifically to Edward Gibbon's "enlightenments".⁵³

⁵³ See the first volume of Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, subtitled in the plural: *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*. Along with a considerable debt, the present essay's relation to Pocock's arguments would be the subject of an essay in itself. His five volumes

This new stage becomes visible when we consider Gibbon's critical remarks about Smith and especially Hume in the present passage. Gibbon reacts to Smith's account of how aristocratic factions were dismantled in favor of "luxury and government", and "private expenses", by chastening Smith for "prov[ing], perhaps too severely, that the most salutary effects have flowed from the meanest and most selfish causes" (3:1058 & n. 92). In other words, social change should not be viewed as the creation of legitimate conditions once and for all, or as the disclosure of a bedrock of natural causes. Legitimacy, Gibbon implies, is a feature that admits of historical, and not simply stadial, gradations. And so the historian would reassert his rights over the political economist. Gibbon's criticism of Hume goes farther. In the first volume of the *History of England*, Hume described the "dangerous crisis" that was to oppose Henry II to Thomas à Becket in the twelfth century, and he made plain that this crisis concerned "other catholic countries as well". Arguing that "the union of the civil and ecclesiastic power" was a positive force, Hume tried to change the terms of the discussion:

Whether the supreme magistrate, who unites these powers, receives the appellation of prince or prelate, is not material: The superior weight, which temporal interests commonly bear in the apprehensions of men above spiritual, renders the civil part of his character most prevalent; and in time prevents those gross impostures and bigotted persecutions, which, in all false religions, are the chief foundation of clerical authority.⁵⁴

In the final clauses, the religious skeptic pierces through what otherwise seems an irenic pose. Gibbon was capable of much the same, and the opposition between supreme power and "clerical authority" was probably not the problem. He will go on in the passage to agree with Hume that church government, though it can be mild and humane, is ill-equipped for political responsibility in the world. Suffice it to mention, from among Gibbon's arguments, that the pope (always a "young statesman of three-score") will necessarily "consider the missal, or the crucifix, as more useful instruments than the plough or the loom". Nevertheless, he objects to the idea that "spiritual" power can simply be fused with politics or political

are in some ways a mammoth exploration of Gibbon's first volume rather than of all six, providing historical depth and context for its narratives of political change and for its portraits of the "domestic" forces that were soon to enter the thinking and actions of the post-Antonine and modern Augustan worlds. Viewed from another angle, Pocock invites readers to think of the *Decline* as the sum of many Enlightenments across Western Europe, and of their limitations, but probably not their transcendence.

⁵⁴ Hume, *The History of England*, 1:389–390.

economy: Hume, he charges, “too hastily concludes, that if the civil and ecclesiastical powers be united in the same person, it is of little moment whether he be styled prince or prelate, since the temporal character will always predominate” (3:1058–1059 & n. 93; his italics). Gibbon thereby underlines an historical specificity in the practice of power in modern Western societies. One of the main lessons of the *Decline*, and Gibbon’s serendipitous experience in writing it, was the ricochet of his youthful orientalism: the history of the (Eastern) church could not be omitted from study if one wished to understand Western modernity. It therefore made little sense to imagine, as Hume probably wished to do, that modern Europe could reinvent a continuity with the religious skepticism of the ancient Romans⁵⁵ or that politics could be a science. Gibbon would have felt on more solid ground in making his case for the origins of the European Reformation (and its political upheaval) in the Paulician heresy of Armenia in the 9th century (ch. 54). In short, Gibbon saw his world as *historically* Christian and reasonably if not fully tolerant, rather than post-Christian or pagan. Without denying the roots and pertinence of skepticism (3:86), he could not imagine giving skepticism full rein in the understanding of power in society. His deepest reservations may therefore have concerned another kind of union, in which the historian, who is “always to some extent a politician”, could be entirely subsumed by the latter. History would in that case dissolve into factiousness and superficiality, at the cost of its impartiality and balanced accuracy.⁵⁶

The Enlightenment that can be deduced from this short passage encompasses the entire space of Western modernity rather than a fragment of it in Florence or Edinburgh. It is neither political nor economic per se. If Gibbon faults Smith for being reductive about how private or domestic life evolved in modern social orders, his criticism of Hume adds the idea that spiritual interests cannot be lastingly rationalized in public life or dissolved into reasons of state. There are surely connections to be made

⁵⁵ Even then Gibbon perceived a balance that maintained conditions for spiritual expression and for toleration: “The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful” (1:56). It is here perhaps that Hume’s attachment to Greece as the model for Europe, rather than Italy, becomes relevant. See *Essays*, p. 121.

⁵⁶ Gibbon may already have been thinking along lines that Burke’s *Reflections*, p. 172, would soon articulate more effectively. “But power, of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support. [...] Kings will be tyrants from policy when subject are rebels from principle”.

between these thoughts of the mid- or late-1780s and Gibbon's views in the early chapters, written more than a decade before, about the oddly good government of the otherwise benighted Persian magi (1:224–225) and the languid souls of the free and spirited Germans. But it is more to the point to say that in this account of Italy, Edinburgh and Lausanne, Gibbon was no longer thinking of Rome's *impensés* but rather sketching the character of contemporary civilization, which he associated with politeness, military power and Europe.

Having spoken of a unitary Enlightenment in that space, I must allude to two last elements that put that claim in perspective and perhaps in doubt. They will suggest that in relation to Gibbon, it is useful to speak of enlightenments in the plural not only because his experience was complex and culturally varied, but also because in these matters he was simply not of one mind. The proof of it may lie in what remains even today the most famous series of excursive chapters in all of the *Decline*, the extraneous treatment of early Christianity that ends Volume 1 (ch. 15–16). In those chapters, Gibbon takes on a task that certain of his enlightenment models amply encouraged, a risky, philosophical analysis of the evidence for the Christian representation of its own beginnings. Chapter 15 opens on a note of caution: “A candid but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity may be considered as a very essential part of the history of the Roman empire” (1:446). In fact, Gibbon seems to be saying two things at once. First, the progress of Christianity is a “very essential part” of Roman history—though he had already reached the year 324 AD without referring to the new religion more than once or twice, as if social corruption and politics could be their own story after all! Second, an inquiry into that subject is a “very essential part” of writing a history of Rome, if only because inquiry, or Greek *ístoria*, has been considered an essential part of history-writing since Herodotus. Whatever the reasons for this overlapping statement, Gibbon's stake in the mode of “inquiry” is clear in both chapters. The word and its cognates are regularly repeated, even if he announces from the start that “this inquiry, however useful or entertaining, is attended with [...] peculiar difficulties”.

Despite the common idea that Chapters 15 and 16 are quintessential Gibbon, they have lately been analyzed as a kind of literary mishap that occurred in the course of his writing, when the author lost control of his irony.⁵⁷ This revision is startling, even as it corresponds in some ways

⁵⁷ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 5, *Religion: The First Triumph*.

to Gibbon's later views about the chapters and to some aspects of his subsequent practice. Among other things, the reader will note that the scope given to "inquiry" and the verb "inquire" is cut back in the volumes that follow, or, alternatively, that they subside again to the occasional presence they had in the chapters before 15 and 16.⁵⁸ Gibbon's "inquiry" in the two chapters started up religious controversies that seemed to take him by surprise,⁵⁹ and would have done so all the more if he felt he was practicing the art of the historian in an exemplary way and interrogating the past in order to understand it more fully. But this is not really what we observe in those chapters or, regarding inquiry, in the *Decline* in general. Even as Gibbon gives regular signs that "inquiry" is indeed related to the best practice of history,⁶⁰ he connects it on many other occasions with the customary practice of ancient philosophy,⁶¹ theology⁶² and perhaps most strikingly of all, with the practice of legal inquests: Diocletian "caused a diligent inquiry to be made 'for all the ancient books which treated of the admirable art of making gold and silver, and without pity committed them to the flames'" (1:372). To these distinct disciplinary contexts, all of which could be illustrated by a great many passages, we should also recall an important title that is cited in chapters 15 and 16 and that must have played a part in Gibbon's concentrated use of the word there: Conyers Middleton's *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed*

⁵⁸ A word count performed with the help of the online text of Mr R. Mullin (www.yellowloam.com/books/gibbon/index.html) indicates that chapters 15 and 16 contain 23 of the 160 occurrences of "inquiry" and its cognates in the *Decline*. The work as a whole runs to 71 chapters. Two other occurrences can be added from the 1776 and 1788 prefaces.

⁵⁹ The reader is again referred to his letter dated 7 May 1776: *The Letters of Edward Gibbon*, 2:107–108. The result was of course the *Vindication*.

⁶⁰ "Tacitus most assuredly deserves that title [of "most accurate observer"], and even his cautious suspense is a proof of his diligent inquiries" (1:259 n. 27). Cp. "the spirit of enquiry and the love of books to which I owe the happiness of my life" (Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, pp. 117, 222).

⁶¹ "The spirit of inquiry, prompted by emulation, and supported by freedom, had divided the public teachers of philosophy into a variety of contending sects; but the ingenuous youth, who, from every part, resorted to Athens, and the other seats of learning in the Roman empire, were alike instructed in every school to reject and to despise the religion of the multitude" (1:58).

⁶² "But the most sagacious of the Christian theologians, the great Athanasius himself, has candidly confessed, that whenever he forced his understanding to meditate on the divinity of the *Logos*, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves; that the more he thought, the less he comprehended; and the more he wrote, the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts. In every step of the enquiry, we are compelled to feel and acknowledge the immeasurable disproportion between the size of the object and the capacity of the human mind" (1:775–776; Gibbon's emphasis).

to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries (1747, 1749; cp. 1:473 n. 79). Long before these chapters, Gibbon's reading of Middleton at Oxford had precipitated his conversion to Roman Catholicism and thus his long path to Lausanne, England, Rome and the *Decline*. But in 1776, he set about conducting the *Free Inquiry* on his own terms.

It would seem to follow that the "inquiry" of chapters 15 and 16 stages a confrontation among disciplines. Gibbon attempts to merge the techniques of history, philosophy and theology, and even to envisage his subject as a legal historian might, in relation to political power. (One other cognate, relating to spiritual power, that of "inquisitor of the faith" would, according to Gibbon, be established only during the reign of Theodosius; 2:37).⁶³ As we have seen, Gibbon was an author writing in a national context in which history was an uncertain and in some ways questionable discipline, and at the same time he was aware of achievements in other places which invited him to aspire to the rank of "philosophical historian". It may well be that the polemical reactions to his vision of early Christianity served to make him more prudent about his language. But it may also be that they more immediately helped him to clarify his sense of the history he meant to write. He would reaffirm but also "circumscribe and compress" his method at the opening of ch. 47, in proposing "a modest enquiry into the doctrines of the primitive church" (2:932 & n. 1), giving fuller rein to historical narrative than to philosophy (3:175). The conflict of disciplines could only be one in which, as Collingwood later put it, "historical inquiry reveals to the historian the powers of his own mind".⁶⁴

Gibbon had made the point already, in the ending of chapter 54 on the Paulicians, and his concern was not only with the mind's powers but also with its "limits". Middleton and Robertson had both associated the Renaissance with a new and "bold spirit of inquiry" that sparked the Reformation as by a chain reaction.⁶⁵ But Gibbon came to feel that modern

⁶³ The *Decline* introduces a typographical difference in volumes 2–6 among these various forms, which at least in the second volume (1781) consists in certain uses beginning in in- and others in en-. This may be an accident of typesetters and contemporary spelling, but it may also be a sign of a momentary attempt by the author to distinguish between those meanings.

⁶⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946; Oxford, 1956), p. 218.

⁶⁵ See Conyers Middleton, "Introductory Discourse" in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton, D.D.* (London, 1752), 4 vols., 1: XXXII, and Robertson, *History of Charles V*, 2:116–117.

Europe was also adult Europe, and that something still newer was underway. The laws in favor of toleration had been enlarged and overstepped by public practice. He concluded that "the mind has understood the limits, of its powers, and the words or shadows that might amuse the child can no longer satisfy his manly reason". He therefore found it understandable that "the friends of Christianity are alarmed at the boundless impulse of enquiry and scepticism" (3:439). "The limits, of its powers": the oddly placed comma directs us to other spheres open to inquiry, such as those of action and space. For Gibbon certainly did not mean to limit the scope of other inquiries, whether Smith's *Inquiry* that we abbreviate as *The Wealth of Nations* or a late panegyric of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* which expressed what might seem an earlier view: "no work has been more read and criticised; and the spirit of enquiry which it has excited, is not the least of our obligations to the author" (3:612 n. 139).

Placing bounds on inquiry could easily have favored a practice of history centered on inherited custom (2:75), though it would not have been the philosophical history of the *Decline*. But there is one final point concerning space, intimately connected to the entire project of the *Decline*, that again shows how Gibbon could not easily lay claim to a single position on these matters. Along with encouraging him to write in English, Hume made another decisive recommendation shortly after reading the first edition of the *Decline*. Gibbon had placed all of his notes at the back of the volume but since, as Hume noted, the notes were not simply bibliographical references, they put the reader in the difficult position of having to read in two parts of the book at once. It was thus thanks to Hume that the running commentary of the notes was relocated to the bottom of each page of the *Decline*, starting with the third edition of 1776. The result is not only more comfortable physically; moving down and up from text to notes is one of the *Decline's* entertaining features. But it is impossible for Gibbon's reader not to feel at the same time that his or her attention is being divided and distracted, and that that almost instantaneous movement across space from the narration of history or the discussion of states, to the author at work among his books and drawing pointed conclusions on specific issues, and then back, often thwarts better understanding. Where is the authority? In the narrative or the thought? or in the author judging or thinking? We have seen at some length how Gibbon had renounced the unity of space and a single idea of history, even when he knew they were problems deserving his attention. Could one not say of erudition and history what the young historian did in complaining of

Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV*? Voltaire's "method (of treating every article in a distinct chapter) I think vicious, as they are all connected in human affairs, and as they are often the cause of each other, why sepearate them in History?"⁶⁶ A necessary vice, this practice aimed at the intelligibility of complex societies and their interactions with others. It was the base of Gibbon's monument.

⁶⁶ Gibbon's *Journal to January 28th, 1763*, p. 129 (sic). For continuing regrets about the problem of where to put the notes, see—the note at Gibbon, *Autobiographies*, p. 339.

2. POLITICS AND CULTURE IN HUME'S *HISTORY OF ENGLAND*

Simon Kow

J.G.A. Pocock has remarked that “Hume is the only major philosopher to have produced a major work of historiography, and to have expounded his philosophy through the medium of historiography without the aid of a historicist philosophy of the kind appearing in the next century”.¹ Nevertheless, while Hume's *History of England* (1754–62) may have been considered “for at least a hundred years, the standard history of the English nation”,² it was relatively neglected thereafter until recent decades and is not as commented upon by interpreters of Hume as such works as *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Indeed, the relation between Hume's history and his philosophy is far from clear, not least because Hume makes no explicit reference in his history to the *Treatise*, the two *Enquiries*, or other such works regarded as central to his philosophical thought.³ At best, Hume's status as the first “philosophical historian”⁴ should be taken in a broad sense; as Pocock points out, “philosophy” in Hume's time “very often denoted a fixed determination to have nothing to do with epistemology, metaphysics or what could otherwise be termed ‘minute philosophy’”.⁵

Although the degree to which Hume's “minute philosophy” and his historical work can be linked poses major difficulties for the interpreter, we

¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume 2: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), p. 176.

² David Fate Norton, “History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought”, in David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, 1965), p. xxxii.

³ Norton, however, argues that history and philosophy *are* deeply connected in Hume's thought, but that as a sceptic, Hume came to see that a science of human nature is impossible for both the philosopher and the historian. At best, historical judgement is a form of opinion. See Norton, “History and Philosophy”, pp. xlvi–l. More recently, Nicholas Phillipson has traced some ways in which Hume's philosophical development culminated in his historical work. See Phillipson, *Hume* (New York, 1989).

⁴ See Hugh Trevor-Roper, “David Hume, Historian,” in *History and the Enlightenment*, ed. John Robertson (New Haven, 2010), p. 120. David Wootton notes the identification of “philosophical history” with “conjectural history” (Dugald Stewart's term) and “natural history” (as in Hume's *The Natural History of Religion*) in “David Hume, ‘the historian,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2nd ed., ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge, Eng., 2009), p. 453 n. 14.

⁵ Pocock, *Barbarism*, p. 177.

can nevertheless elucidate the political theory underlying Hume's *History of England*. There have been, however, conflicting interpretations of the character of Hume's political philosophy as conveyed through the *History*. Following upon Laurence Bongie's careful study of Hume's influence on French counter-revolutionary thought, which suggests the essentially conservative nature of Hume's political thinking in the *History*,⁶ Donald Livingston and Nicholas Capaldi stress Hume's proto-Burkean distrust of foundationalist and speculative theory and conception of all moral and political norms as contextually grounded (as opposed to concepts of rights, liberty, and so forth as eternal and unchanging principles).⁷ In contrast, Duncan Forbes describes Hume as a "sceptical Whig" who shared the Whiggish view that English history manifests the progress of European civilization but criticized the chauvinistic characterization of absolute monarchies in France and elsewhere on the continent as inferior to English government.⁸ John B. Stewart is more explicit in arguing for Hume's liberalism: the *History of England* culminates, after all, in the liberty gained from the 1688 revolution and subsequent constitution. He would reject both conservative Toryism and the revolutionary republicanism of sympathizers of the French Revolution; liberal Whiggism since the 1790s was closer to Hume's position.⁹

What explains such divergent perspectives on the political theory in Hume's historical work? Hume's standard of impartiality on political and historical matters particularly lends itself to diverse readings of his historical work. Hume's account especially of the reigns of the Stuarts and the Glorious Revolution—the first two volumes of the *History* to be published—seeks to steer between Whig and Tory interpretations of England's political history. In a letter to John Clephane from 1756, two years after the first volume appeared, Hume remarked that in the *History*, "[m]y views on *things* are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of

⁶ Laurence L. Bongie, *David Hume: Prophet of the Counter-Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, 1998).

⁷ Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston, eds., *Liberty in Hume's History of England* (Dordrecht, 1990), pp. 105–53 and 195–224; and see also Donald W. Livingston, "David Hume and the Conservative Tradition," *The Intercollegiate Review* 44 (2009), 30–41.

⁸ Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, Eng., 1975), pp. 140–161; see also his "Introduction" to David Hume, *The History of Great Britain*, ed. Duncan Forbes (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 18–24.

⁹ John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 223–31. Similarly, David Wootton acknowledges the difficulty in categorizing Hume's political stance in the *History*, but concludes that his revisions "brought him closer to the court Whig position." Wootton, "Hume, 'the historian'," pp. 465–69.

persons to Tory prejudices."¹⁰ Presumably, Hume meant to say that he held a conception of history as the progress of political and other institutions towards liberty, especially as manifest in the tremendous powers of the House of Commons in modern Britain, while maintaining the due respect to historical actors such as Charles I who upheld the rightful privileges of the monarch and nobility. But this formulation of things and persons does not adequately capture Hume's approach to history. Arguably, Hume's quest for impartiality arose from the desire not only to free historical writing from party prejudice, but also to expound a theory of political life informed by historical change. That is to say, for Hume, neither Whig principles nor Tory prejudices would do as the only bases for understanding the English constitution.

Humean impartiality, then, must be seen as stemming from Hume's overall conceptions of history and political culture which were applied to the history of England. Some commentators have sought to situate Hume's thought as a decisive break with seventeenth-century ahistorical conceptions of human nature and politics, by thus placing history at the very heart of Humean politics. Richard H. Dees regards Hume as a thoroughly contextualist thinker, for whom the principles of morals and politics can only be discovered and interpreted through the cultural context of a particular community at a particular time, notwithstanding the moral sentiments in humanity.¹¹ Donald Livingston goes even further in arguing that for Hume, "human nature is in constant change"; human beings can only be understood through the "prejudices, customs, and traditions" of the society in which they live.¹²

As Neil McArthur persuasively counters, Hume's concern that political practices conform to particular customs and traditions of a society does not exclude a universalist framework in which, for example, a society should be purged of its barbaric tendencies according to the standards of modern civilization.¹³ In this light, Hume's *History of England* may be interpreted as a work which follows shifts in political culture over time while ultimately championing bourgeois civilization. Unlike Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, which surveys monarchies, republics, and despotisms around

¹⁰ David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), 1:237 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ Richard H. Dees, "Hume and the Contexts of Politics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992), 266–67.

¹² Livingston, "Hume's Historical Conception," in Capaldi and Livingston, eds., *Hume's History of England*, pp. 124–25.

¹³ Neil McArthur, *David Hume's Political Theory* (Toronto, 2007), pp. 120–31.

the globe, Hume's *History* focuses on one country; but his treatment, particularly in its critique of the so-called Whig interpretation of history, exemplifies the idea of cultural transition between different historical periods. Moreover, the work does not simply set out a linear progression in English history towards an enlightened age, but is instead a narrative of the fluctuating struggles between liberty and authority in England. Hume sought to be attentive to the distinct political cultures in the historical development of the English constitution, but it is a development interpreted through the lens of bourgeois thought, emphasizing the contributions of commerce, science, and arts—both liberal and mechanical—to the civilized society of propertied individuals.¹⁴ It is within this peculiarly modern perspective that Hume's impartial stance relative to Whig and Tory doctrines in eighteenth-century Britain should be situated. Despite, however, the novelty of Hume's approach, reflective of the unique orientation to history in eighteenth-century thought, Humean impartiality did not transcend the principles of eighteenth-century liberal or conservative thinking but merely arbitrated between them.

Predecessors

Craig Walton has argued that Hume's *History* is a Baconian natural history, particularly in the links Hume made between the progress of mechanical and liberal arts on the one hand, and laws and government on the others. He adds that Hume undertook "what Bacon barely started" in *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (1622).¹⁵ Hume certainly esteemed Bacon as the "great glory of literature in this island, during the reign of James", but admired "the variety of talents displayed by this man" more than his natural philosophy (for Hume, inferior to Galileo's).¹⁶ Hume did not explicitly mention Baconian natural history as a model for his own work. Nevertheless, Hume may very well have concurred with Bacon's judgement that history is most instructive not in describing "great wars and conquests (which many times are the works of fortune and fall out in barbarous times)" but rather in chronicling "times refined in policies and industries,

¹⁴ In this regard, I disagree with Victor Wexler's view that Hume's remarks on manners and customs "are in no way essential" to his narrative of the English constitution. Victor G. Wexler, *David Hume and the History of England* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. xi.

¹⁵ Craig Walton, "Hume's 'England' as a Natural History of Morals," in Capaldi and Livingston, eds., *Hume's History of England*, p. 44.

¹⁶ David Hume, *The History of England*, 6 vols. (1778; repr., Indianapolis, 1983), 5:153.

new and rare variety of accidents and alterations" as well as "encounters" between states and princes.¹⁷ Bacon sought to record what was both novel and refined, a task made possible (in his view) by the refinement of the age, in which "throughout Europe, you shall find more knowledge in the world than was in the ages before, whereby the wits of men (which are the shops wherein all actions are forged) are more furnished and improved."¹⁸ History could be more instructional as well as entertaining in an age of learning and hence civilization. Hume shared Bacon's view that the middle ages were a low point in European civilization, and that subsequent times witnessed improvements in learning, trade, and government, all of which are linked. The very writing of such a work as the *History of England* indicated the superior state of civilization which made it possible, thus Hume's declaration that "this is the historical Age and this the historical Nation" (meaning Scotland, however, not England).¹⁹

In contrast to Hume's employment of Bacon's *History* for source material if not philosophical inspiration, he seems to have had no use for the other great history written by a seventeenth-century English philosopher: Hobbes's *Behemoth; or, the Long Parliament* (1679). It may be that Hume was predisposed against any work written by Hobbes, given that "Hobbes's politics are fitted only to promote tyranny, and his ethics to encourage licentiousness." Hume detested Hobbes's "dogmatical" approach to philosophy and religion, conceding only "Clearness and propriety of style" as the "chief excellencies of Hobbes's writings."²⁰ Still, there is much in Hobbes's *Behemoth* which forms a useful backdrop to Hume's treatment of history and the English civil war in particular. Hobbes's commentary on the causes and events of the civil war and Commonwealth period, as conveyed through the Hobbesian interlocutors of his dialogical history, is uniformly hostile to the claims of English revolutionaries and critical also of the Royalists' concessions to Parliament—demonstrating the extent to which neither side of the initial conflict understood the need for an absolute sovereign.²¹ Thus *Behemoth* is consistent with the central political

¹⁷ Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), p. 211.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Hume, *Letters*, 2.230. On Hume's admiration of ancient models of historiography, in contrast to the paucity of his fellow historians, see Wootton, "Hume, 'the historian,'" pp. 449–52.

²⁰ Hume, *History of England*, 6:153.

²¹ See Simon Kow, "Maistre and Hobbes on Providential History and the English Civil War," *Clio* 30 (2001), 270–72.

teaching which Hume caricatured and dismissed. But as Stephen Holmes argues, Hobbes's history brings out aspects of his thought—the problem of religious zeal and the need to regulate the opinions of human beings—which do not fit the conceptions of Hobbesian man as wholly driven by the desire of self-preservation or Hobbesian sovereignty as principally supported by the threat of physical coercion.²² Hobbes emphasized religious and ideological causes of the civil war: not only the corruption of the common people by such “seducers” as the Presbyterians, Independents, and republican Parliamentarians, but also Papal interference in temporal affairs which Hobbes tended to equate with radical Protestant rebellion.²³ Moreover, Hobbes's tentative remedy against future outbreaks of civil war focuses on salutary teachings of political obedience orchestrated through control of the universities: “men may be brought to a love of obedience by preachers and gentlemen that imbibe good principles in their youth at the universities, and also . . . we shall never have a lasting peace till the Universities themselves be in such manner, as you have said, reformed”.²⁴ Hume would re-emphasize the role of opinion in sustaining peace as well as the Catholic “superstition” and Puritan “enthusiasm” which destabilized England and corrupted its people. Although Hume unlike Hobbes would integrate his account of the civil war into a wider narrative of the growth of liberty in England, his vision of the struggles between liberty and authority in the *History of England* has a trace of an Hobbesian pedigree: as Hobbes wrote, “[f]or in a way beset with those that contend, on one side for too great Liberty, and on the other side for too much Authority, 'tis hard to passe between the points of both unwounded.”²⁵

Hume rejected the contractarianism exemplified most thoughtfully in Hobbes's political thought; but his explicit critique of social contract theory was directed at Locke and his Whig successors, targets of both his political and historical writing. Hobbes's account of the “naturall condition of mankind” and the institution of the sovereign state by social covenant is meant to be hypothetical, not historical; conquest rather than contract is the likely historical origin of government, given that “there is scarce a Common-wealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be

²² Stephen Holmes, “Introduction” to Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* (1889; repr., Chicago, 1990), pp. x–xi.

²³ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 1–5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), p. 3.

justified.”²⁶ In contrast, Locke was much less clear about the historical status of his social contract, especially in his ambiguous treatment of the state of nature as it relates to the state of war, civil society, and the mythical “golden age.”²⁷ Yet this ambiguity made possible the view that King James II's bid for absolute monarchy was an abrogation of an original contract between prince and people, thus justifying the 1688 revolution as upholding the original contract despite the absence of historical evidence to support the existence of such a contract.

It was left to Whig historians to interpret the history of the English constitution in a manner congenial to the justification of the events of 1688 on contractual grounds. Paul Rapin de Thoyras's *History of England* (trans. Tindal, 1726–30) was particularly influential in promulgating the view of the English constitution as essentially unchanged since the ancient Saxons. Thus Magna Carta upheld ancient parliamentary freedoms against the Norman constitution; and in more recent times, Stuarts such as Charles I sought to subvert the ancient English constitution by subordinating parliament to the will of the royal court.²⁸ Hume himself had regarded Rapin's history as unsurpassed and admired its impartiality and anti-clericalism, but by the time of the writing of his own *History of England*, he characterized Rapin's history as “totally despicable.”²⁹ As Victor Wexler argues, Hume exaggerated Rapin's partiality,³⁰ thus underscoring his own impartial treatment as he saw it.

Rapin's history was, however, a major influence on Bolingbroke. Writing against the corruption in English government under Robert Walpole, Bolingbroke asserted in *A Dissertation upon Parties* (1733–4) that “our constitution is in the strictest sense a bargain, a conditional contract between the prince and the people, as it always hath been, and still is, between the representative and collective bodies of the nation.”³¹ He supported this claim with what Forbes has described as a “diluted” version of Rapin's

²⁶ Ibid., p. 486.

²⁷ See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge, Eng., 1988), pp. 269–82 and 330–44.

²⁸ Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, *The History of England, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil*, trans. N. Tindal, 15 vols. (London, 1726–30), 3:220, 12:583–85, 14:398–400, 14:405–6; Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, pp. 236–40.

²⁹ Forbes, “Introduction”, pp. 25–29.

³⁰ Victor G. Wexler, “David Hume's Discovery of a New Scene of Historical Thought,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 10 (1976/77), 190.

³¹ Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *A Dissertation upon Parties*, in *Political Writings*, ed. David Armitage (Cambridge, Eng., 1970), p. 124.

history.³² He depicted Britain as “the temple of liberty” in all ages and the ancient Britons as freemen. After the Romans left, British kings ruled only by the authority of the people as represented in popular assemblies, as did the Saxon kings after them.³³ The Normans sought to impose tyranny upon the people, but the “root” of the constitution “remained untouched” and re-grew. The rights of parliament were continually preserved, such that they “were constituted almost as they now are, and were entirely built on the same general principles, as well as directed to the same purposes.”³⁴ Consequently, the Stuart dynasty acted against a relatively unchanged “spirit of the constitution,”³⁵ leading first to civil war and later the alliance of Whigs and Tories to oppose James II. Bolingbroke’s characterization of the revolution settlement as a “new Magna Carta”³⁶ was not hyperbole in his mind: the Glorious Revolution simply defended ancient liberties from 1215 and further back in antiquity. Moreover, Bolingbroke’s conception of an unchanging English constitution asserted not only the uniqueness but also superiority of English political life over the rest of Europe and the world. Although, for example, France shared the same Germanic ancestors as Britain, its kings became absolute monarchs, destroying all traces of Gothic liberty.³⁷ Bolingbroke’s Lockean defence of a mixed constitution as supported by a Whig interpretation of history implied a cultural chauvinism particularly against neighbouring France. Hume would reject both what he regarded as an unhistorical view of the English constitution and the Anglocentrism implicit in Whig ideology.

The Role of History and the Concept of Culture

History took on a significance for Hume which was absent for philosophers who devalue experience as a source of knowledge relative to reason or revelation. Even Hobbes, who like Hume grounded his philosophy in human nature, regarded history as “Knowledge of Fact,” unlike “SCIENCE, that is, knowledge of Consequences; which is called also PHILOSOPHY.”³⁸ Although Hobbes’s *Behemoth; or the Long Parliament* investigates the

³² Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, pp. 240–41.

³³ Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, pp. 113–15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 154–5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 154–57.

³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 60–61.

causes of the English civil war and its effects, historical narrative in itself is not "scientific" as it does not set down definitions, geometrically proceeding from definitions to consequences in a logical fashion.³⁹ Hume, of course, cast sceptical doubts on our ability to know causes on any basis other than experience, i.e., the customary conjunction of our ideas of objects.⁴⁰ It is not the case that for Hume, all knowledge is rendered doubtful, but rather that, contra Hobbes, "knowledge of fact" is the sole basis of "knowledge of consequences."

Thus history for Hume is more than "philosophy teaching by examples," in the words of Bolingbroke. As Ernest Mossner puts it, philosophy in Hume's view "is the product of history, itself the narrative of the course taken by human nature, past, present, and future."⁴¹ What does this mean? Hume thought that history furnished the materials for investigating human nature (the sole and proper object of philosophy, in his view). It is not simply that the philosopher abstracts from history the universal principles of human nature, but rather that the history of humanity, and that of particular countries, is constitutive of the knowledge of humanity. If the very operation of the human mind consists of the association of ideas, then any knowledge of human affairs, including politics, will be based on history:

... the historian traces the series of actions according to their natural order, remounts to their secret springs and principles, and delineates their most remote consequences. He chooses for his subject a certain portion of that great chain of events, which compose the history of mankind.... He sees, that the knowledge of causes is not only the most satisfactory; this relation or connection being the strongest of all others, but also *the most instructive; since it is by this knowledge alone we are enabled to controul events, and govern futurity.*⁴²

Hume's political philosophy is inseparable from his work as historian.

Hume's historical approach to political philosophy is evident in his critique of social contract theory.⁴³ His conception of justice as the virtue

³⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ See section 5 of David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1999), pp. 119–30.

⁴¹ Ernest C. Mossner, "An Apology for David Hume, Historian," *Publications of the MLA of America* 16 (1941), 665.

⁴² Hume, *Human Understanding*, p. 103 (emphasis added).

⁴³ David Gauthier thinks that Hume's theories of justice and government are, notwithstanding explicit disavowals of Whig contractarianism, essentially and fundamentally contractarian. David Gauthier, "David Hume, Contractarian," *The Philosophical Review* 88

relating solely to property, his view that a peaceful “uncultivated” society could have existed without government,⁴⁴ his emphasis on the promotion of commerce, and his championing of the middle class⁴⁵ would suggest an essentially Lockean stance on political society. Hume’s political thought is thus modern and bourgeois in its emphasis on the economic nature of civil society.⁴⁶ But Hume rejected the doctrine “which founds all lawful government on an *original contract*, or consent of the people” as among those theories which are “repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all nations and all ages.” Locke’s deductions from this doctrine that “all absolute monarchy is inconsistent with civil society” and that there can be no taxation without consent are opinions “wide of the general practice of mankind.”⁴⁷ The testimony of history and the world’s opinion should lead us to reject this doctrine. Hume conceded that the first governments may have been founded on a kind of contract whereby ancient peoples would have consented to give up their original liberties in exchange for laws (though the lack of a written record of this contract renders it literally pre-historical). Even such consent, however, “was long very imperfect, and could not be the basis of a regular administration” given the warlike state of the first governments. Indeed, “being so ancient, and being obliterated by a thousand changes of government and princes. . . . [this social contract] cannot now be supposed to retain any authority,” given that all governments we know of today “have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both, without any pretence of a fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people.”⁴⁸ This acknowledgement of the morally questionable origins of government was directed against the Whig view that no allegiance is owed to absolute sovereigns,⁴⁹ and grounded on the view that “society must be esteem’d, in a manner, accidental, and the effect of many ages.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the right of government should not be derived from an ancient or even hypothetical contract, but rather on “that which gives authority

(1979), 3–38. My concern here, however, is with these explicit disavowals as evidence of the historical content of Hume’s critique of Whig contract theory.

⁴⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2007), 1:3.2.8, pp. 346–47.

⁴⁵ See David Hume, “Of the Middle Station of Life,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 545–51.

⁴⁶ Stewart, *Hume’s Political Philosophy*, p. 120.

⁴⁷ Hume, “Of the Original Contract,” in *Essays*, pp. 486–87 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 468–71.

⁴⁹ See Hume, *Treatise*, 1:3.2.8, p. 351.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:3.2.2, p. 316.

to all the most establish'd governments of the world without exception: I mean, *long possession* in any one form of government, or succession of princes." Uncertain claims to sovereignty gain legitimacy through time: "Time alone gives solidity to their right; and operating gradually on the minds of men, reconciles them to any authority, and makes it seem just and reasonable."⁵¹ Hume displaced the role of consent at a particular imaginary moment in an original contract with that of opinion and habit under established governments.

This theory of prescription might appear to validate any established regime whatsoever, but Hume's historically informed politics favours the development of civilized culture and thus established governments which promote civilized society. Like Montesquieu, Hume was attentive to the integrated aspects of different societies such that we can use the concept of "culture" to characterize the totality of political institutions, commerce, manners, arts, and sciences in a given society.⁵² He shared Montesquieu's view that one should examine not only how the peculiar characteristics of a people influence the nature of their governments, but also how political laws and institutions influence people's manners and other aspects of society.⁵³ Thus political constitutions both influence and are influenced by the state of commerce, arts, and sciences. Commerce will tend to decay in monarchies because it is considered less honourable than the pursuit of rank and glory,⁵⁴ whereas it flourishes in republics such as the Netherlands and semi-republics such as England.⁵⁵ Moreover, the refinement of arts both mechanical and liberal is closely tied to the state of the constitution: "Laws, order, police, discipline; these can never be carried to any degree of perfection, before human reason has refined itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and

⁵¹ Ibid., 1:3.2.10, p. 356.

⁵² As Harvey Chisick points out, Hume tended to recognize culture in the narrow sense of an elite culture of the "great tradition" as opposed to popular culture. This neglect of popular culture was linked to Hume's devaluation of the common people's capacity to rule themselves (which Chisick sees as an additional aspect of his critique of social contract theory and popular sovereignty) relative to their enlightened superiors (especially enlightened philosophers). Harvey Chisick, "David Hume and the Common People," in Peter Jones, ed., *The "Science of Man" in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid, and their Contemporaries* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 12–16.

⁵³ Stewart, *Hume's Political Philosophy*, p. 148; Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, p. 224.

⁵⁴ Hume, "Of Civil Liberty," in *Essays*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1998), p. 130.

manufacture.”⁵⁶ Hume, along with Montesquieu and other eighteenth-century writers, but in marked contrast to Rousseau, regarded cultural refinement and extensive commerce as contributory to good laws and institutions. But this unambiguously positive treatment of refinement and commerce nonetheless recognises diversity even among civilized states. Duncan Forbes has argued that Hume’s Scottishness freed him from the Whiggish parochialism (particularly Francophobia) of England; as Forbes remarks, English chauvinism against the Scots in the 1770s led to Hume’s witty references to the “barbarians on the banks of the Thames.”⁵⁷ Hume perceived an immense diversity of cultures in different times and places, while distinguishing barbaric from civilized countries, the latter consisting of monarchies and republics: absolute and free states enjoying advanced degrees of refinement in the arts, sciences, commerce, and political life (the “indissoluble chain” of “knowledge, industry, and humanity”).⁵⁸

Hume’s differences with Montesquieu, however, reveal his unique conception of the diversity of cultures within the history of a single country. Hume was more sceptical than Montesquieu about the effects of physical causes such as climate or geography on the “national character” of a country, doubting “that men own any thing of their temper or genius to air, food, or climate.”⁵⁹ This point explains his characterization of the “barbarians on the banks of the Thames” in contrast to Montesquieu’s view that northerly climes (such as Scotland’s) foster vigour, courage, and a lack of refinement, whereas hot southerly cultures are distinguished by delicacy, sensuality, and lassitude (as well as his linkage of English melancholy, impatience, and fickleness to miserable weather).⁶⁰ Hume posited instead the centrality of moral causes. Drawing upon his conception of contiguity and sympathy, he wrote that it is not “possible for any set of men to converse often together, without acquiring a similitude of manners, and

⁵⁶ Hume, “Of Refinement in the Arts,” in *Essays*, p. 273.

⁵⁷ Hume, *Letters*, 1:436; Duncan Forbes, “Politics and History in David Hume,” *Historical Journal* 6 (1963), 282.

⁵⁸ Hume, “Of Refinement,” p. 271. See McArthur, *Hume’s Political Theory*, pp. 7–10.

⁵⁹ Hume, “Of National Characters,” in *Essays*, p. 200.

⁶⁰ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge, Eng., 1989), pp. 231–34 and 242–43. This is not to say that Montesquieu was crudely deterministic: for example, while Asian countries (because of climatic and other causes) tend to be despotic, such tendencies can be mitigated by religions such as Confucianism and other moral causes; while France, despite its moderate climate, was prone to despotism in the *ancien régime* of Louis XIV and his successors. See Simon Kow, “Confucianism, Secularism, and Atheism in Bayle and Montesquieu,” *The European Legacy* 16 (2011), 46–48.

communicating to each other their vices as well as virtues." In the company of others, we receive impressions of their manners and naturally seek to imitate those manners (presumably to gain their esteem, though this is not explicit in Hume's account). Consequently, the Chinese "have the greatest uniformity of character imaginable" despite "very considerable variations" of air and climate, because of the long establishment of government in China. Additionally, Hume claimed that the Jews have a distinct society in Europe because they have limited contact with the "native" inhabitants of their countries of residence, relative to the "close society" and communication with fellow Jews in other states, which resembles the Armenians and the Jesuits in this regard.⁶¹ Human beings are creatures of sympathy above all, and the sympathetic bond is the basis of national and cultural identity.

Hume should not be taken as propounding a full-blown nationalism, as if social belonging trumped human nature. As S.K. Wertz argues, the diversity of national characters is for Hume consistent with a uniformity in the "whole fabric of human life."⁶² In other words, the same moral causes such as the form of government, the wealth of the nation, and foreign relations which influence national character also fix "the character of different professions" within a country.⁶³ Hume assumed that despite the diversity of national characters, the professions and trades of people within a society are generally uniform in different countries. Thus university professors from different nations have more in common with each other than they do with beggars in their respective countries. Comparison between different nations and generalizations concerning politics are made possible in this way: to use a Humean example, priests around the world are similarly ambitious such that, taking into account differences of nationality and content of religion, we can make conclusions regarding the role of religion in society.

It also makes possible the writing of history. Hume remarked that because of their mixed government, the diversity of propertied men in authority, their multiple religious sects, and their general personal freedoms, the English, "of any people in the universe, have the least of national character; unless this very singularity pass for such." Free societies tend to lack a national character or have a national character based

⁶¹ Hume, "Of National Characters," pp. 202–5.

⁶² S.K. Wertz, "Hume, History, and Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1975), 487–89.

⁶³ Hume, "Of National Characters," p. 198.

on the absence of uniformity. Moreover, this fluid identity is characteristic of English history. For Hume's conception of national character is dynamic, not static: "The manners of a people change very considerably from one age to another; either by great alterations in their government, by the mixtures of new people, or by that inconstancy, to which all human affairs are subject." A notable example of these changes is that of the British before and after the Roman Conquest; or that of the "abject superstition" in England just a "few centuries ago," succeeded by "the most furious enthusiasm" in the seventeenth century, and by Hume's time, "the most cool indifference with regard to religious matters, that is to be found in any nation of the world."⁶⁴

Hume thought the English to be the most dynamic nation in the world, and hence whose history shows a most remarkable diversity of manners. But despite Hume's obvious praise, implicit even in this brief account of national character over time is the idea that English history is not a straightforward progress from barbarism to civilization. Although eighteenth-century Britain may have been for Hume the freest of societies, the tortuous path to its prosperity and greatness was not a history of steady and gradual improvement over two millennia. For example, seventeenth-century religious enthusiasm may have paved the way for modern English liberty, but such enthusiasm was as barbaric as the Catholic superstition it succeeded. Thus the history of England might be better described as a succession of cultures over time rather than the progressive movement of a single culture.

There is perhaps an analogy here to Hume's conception of personal identity in the *Treatise*. Given his thorough-going empiricism, Hume posited that the self is nothing more than "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement." The identity of the self, and indeed of any object in our understanding, consists merely in "a quality, which we attribute to them [i.e., the succession of perceptions], because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them."⁶⁵ Thus in observing an object, our memory "raise[s] up the images of past perceptions"; the resemblances of the images to the objects lead us to place "these resembling perceptions in the chain of thought,

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 205–7.

⁶⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.4.6, p. 165. For a general discussion of the issues raised by Hume's account, see John P. Wright, *Hume's 'A Treatise of Human Nature'* (Cambridge, Eng., 2009), pp. 158–66.

[which] convey[s] the imagination more easily from one link to another, and make[s] the whole seem like the continuance of one object". We proceed to seek the causal relations between these perceptions.⁶⁶ For our purposes, it might be noted that Hume compared the soul in this context with "a republic or commonwealth": "as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and dispositions, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity."⁶⁷ In thinking of the history of England, it is perhaps the case that the idea of the English constitution as a single object arises from historical memory which traces the unifying thread throughout epochs of that constitution. For if "memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity, by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions",⁶⁸ then it could be argued that by analogy, the role of the historian of England is to uncover the causal relations between different historical periods in order to present to his readers the English constitution as a single entity across a succession of different cultural forms. Hume, however, never explicitly drew this connection.⁶⁹

The History of England

Hume's political purpose in writing *The History of England* is suggested by the fact that he wrote it, as it were, backwards. The first volume (later volume five) was published in 1754 and covered the reigns of James I and Charles I, followed by the volume on the period from the execution of Charles I to the 1688 revolution (later volume six), then the Tudor period (later volumes three to four), and finally, in 1762, the period from the Roman invasion to the death of Richard III (later volumes one to two).⁷⁰ Richard Hurd's remark in 1761 that the spirit of absolute power possessed

⁶⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, 1:1.4.6, p. 170.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Hume also thought that it is almost impossible for adults to vary their characters: see Wright, *Human Nature*, p. 160 n. 33, and Hume, *Treatise*, 1:3.3.4, p. 388.

⁶⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, 1:1.4.6, p. 171 (emphasis in original). See Norton's annotation at 2:814 for Collins' view on personal identity, following Locke, as "Consciousness, or a Memory extending to past Actions".

⁶⁹ Norton and Popkin's *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* includes selections from several works pertaining to philosophy and history, but not Hume's account of personal identity.

⁷⁰ Hume, "My Own Life," in *History of England*, 1:xxx–xxxiii.

Hume to write backwards, as witches do,⁷¹ is not without insight. That he began with the Stuarts points to Hume's interest in interpreting the history of England in light of the events of the seventeenth century. Although the *History* might be regarded as failing to meet the standards of scholarship set by modern-day historians, especially given his reliance on printed sources, his desire to understand the past in terms of the present was no more (and no less) ideological than Whig historical interpretation. As we saw, the Whig historians and Bolingbroke employed the idea of the ancient and free English constitution to justify the post-1688 constitution; Hume went further in showing the historical, even cultural, differences between ancient, medieval, and modern times in Britain.

The *History* is not simply a Tory counterpoint to Whig history, as Hurd suggested. As discussed above, Hume sought to present an impartial history of the country which would adhere neither to Whig nor Tory ideology in all respects: "I thought I was the only historian, that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices." But instead of receiving applause for his impartiality, he was attacked by "English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier," particularly for his expressed sympathies for the fate of Charles I.⁷² Rather than its being merely a Tory history offensive to prevailing Whig sentiment, or an incoherent jumble of Whiggism and Toryism, the *History* arguably confused his readers precisely because of the novelty of his approach, in showing the dramatic, and not linear, shifts between successive political cultures. The reader will not know where Hume stood in general—given, for example, the apparent contradictions between his sympathies for Charles I and his overwhelming praise of the 1688 revolution—without considering the events described in light of the diversity of cultures in English history. While George Sabine argues that Hume "failed to reach an essentially historical point of view,"⁷³ particularly relative to Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophies of history, his *History* nevertheless revealed a novel departure from some of the ahistorical tendencies of his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century precursors, if limited in its theoretical standpoint to history. Hume's remark that in "all governments, there is a perpetual

⁷¹ Qtd. in Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1980), p. 302.

⁷² Hume, "My Own Life," p. xxx.

⁷³ George H. Sabine, "Hume's Contribution to the Historical Method," *Philosophical Review* 15 (1906), 35.

intestine struggle, open or secret, between AUTHORITY and LIBERTY; and neither of them can ever absolutely prevail in the contest",⁷⁴ can be applied as a general framework for the *History of England* as it spans the 700 years from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the 1688 revolution. The struggle between liberty and authority moves through different historical periods which oscillate between excessive authority and excessive liberty. If the goal of *The History of England* is, as Forbes writes, "to enshrine a philosophy of political moderation,"⁷⁵ then the guiding thread of history is confined to the pursuit of a balance between these extremes. The succession of political cultures in English history is recounted by Hume in terms of the ebb and flow of liberty and authority, with the 1688 revolution and the full establishment of mixed government—balanced between monarch, lords, and commons—marking a climax in the struggle between the two; though not the end of the struggle. We can now proceed to a sketch of the distinct cultures which make up English history as interpreted by Hume, such that we can perceive Hume's account of the development of English government, society, and liberty over time.

Barbaric Freedom

Hume wrote that for the English, history since the accession of the Tudors is the truly "useful, as well as the more agreeable part of modern annals,"⁷⁶ whereas an "acquaintance with the ancient periods of their government is chiefly *useful* by instructing them to cherish their present constitution, from a comparison or contrast with the condition of those distant times."⁷⁷ This view countered the Whiggish interpretation of the modern English constitution as relatively unchanged from the old. Moreover, it reflects Hume's narration of the "history of civilization in England", as Forbes puts it.⁷⁸ In other words, he was chiefly interested in civilized society, which for Hume only truly appeared on the historical scene beginning in 1485. Civilized history is more useful than the history of barbaric societies because the historical record is more certain, and above all because liberty and authority approach their maturity in civilized cultures and thus provide

⁷⁴ Hume, "The Origin of Government," in *Essays*, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, p. 121.

⁷⁶ Hume, *History of England*, 3:82.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:525 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁸ Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, p. 298.

more instructive examples of the art of government. And it is more agreeable as well as useful because the reader is presented with the movement from ignorance to enlightenment. The barbaric ages of English history from Caesar's invasion to the late fifteenth century, despite their long duration, are useful principally for furnishing negative examples from the perspective of the civilized reader.⁷⁹ We can survey the almost fifteen centuries of ancient and medieval barbarism which only very slowly, and in rare moments, reveal the faint progenitors of modern social and political life. Even the violent convulsions of civilization are "instructive and interesting" in comparison with the "sudden, violent, and unprepared revolutions, incident to Barbarians, . . . so much guided by caprice and terminate so often in cruelty that they disgust us by the uniformity of their appearance: and it is rather fortunate for letters that they are buried in silence and oblivion."⁸⁰

Hume called the state of nature a "philosophical fiction," useful perhaps for perceiving how justice would not exist where property is absent, but of doubtful historical accuracy.⁸¹ Nevertheless, in the *History of England*, Hume argued that the "ancient Germans were little removed from the state of nature", in that these ancestors of the English were beset by "endless disorders" arising from feuding clans. The Germans were bound by honour to take revenge for attacks on members of their families and clans.⁸² He employed the idea of a lawless state of nature in a fashion not dissimilar to Hobbes's view that ancient Germany was, "as all other countries, in their beginnings, divided amongst an infinite number of little Lords, or Masters of Families, that continually had wars one with another."⁸³ Although Hume distanced himself from an hypothetical natural condition as the foundation for a contractual theory of politics, he regarded the historical origins of England as being little better than a war of all against all. He sought to show the rude and uncultivated beginnings of human society in order to underscore the contrast between civilization and barbarism.

Thus the liberty so rightly valued in eighteenth-century Britain bore little resemblance to the lawless anarchy of the ancient Germans. Hume

⁷⁹ See Eugene F. Miller, "Hume on Liberty in the Successive English Constitutions," in Capaldi and Livingston eds., *Hume's History of England*, p. 58.

⁸⁰ Hume, *History of England*, 1:3–4.

⁸¹ Hume, *Principles of Morals*, pp. 87–88.

⁸² Hume, *History of England*, 1:174.

⁸³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 68.

noted the German barbarians' extreme freedom and virtues, which were the "seeds" of the "free constitutions... which distinguish the European nations".⁸⁴ These seeds, however, were wholly uncultivated, and one might say, distasteful to civilized palates. Although modern Europeans may look to the ancient Germans for the distant origins of the spirit of liberty, Hume (unlike the Whig historians) resisted romanticizing the latter. They may have "carried to the highest pitch the virtues of valour and love of liberty," but these are "the only virtues which can have place among an uncivilized people, where justice and humanity are commonly neglected."⁸⁵ Rather than viewing the ancient Germans as possessing pure mores, Hume found them morally deficient because they lacked the civilized virtues. While peoples such as the Anglo-Saxons (and Hume tended to conflate the manners and mores of all the early British tribes) may have excelled in courage and raw freedom, their often excessive violence and even lack of honesty were characteristic of barbarism. Virtue, wrote Hume in the *History*, "is nothing but a more enlarged and cultivated reason," founded not on "steady principles of honour" alone but on education.⁸⁶ Keeping in mind the view expressed in his works of moral philosophy that it is moral sentiment which favours virtue and reason which instructs and guides moral sentiment,⁸⁷ we may conclude that these barbarians in Hume's conception lacked the enlightened reason to cultivate the civilized virtues; their sentiments were directed towards honour and revenge rather than justice or humanity.

Moreover, Hume stressed the lack of liberty in the English constitution long after the departure of the Romans.⁸⁸ The Anglo-Saxon constitution had often been viewed by Hume's contemporaries as essentially free and democratic, in which the power of the first kings (who were no more than *primus inter pares*) was regulated by the Wittenagemot (an assembly of wise men) who represented the people's interests. But Hume countered that the Wittenagemot was more aristocratic in that it was an ancestor of the eighteenth-century House of Commons, which represented men of property. Given the "low state of commerce" at the time, "we may

⁸⁴ Hume, *History of England*, 1:160–61.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:179–80.

⁸⁷ Hume, *Principles of Morals*, pp. 157–59. On the role of reason in Hume's morality, see David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Morality, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 95–109.

⁸⁸ As Miller points out, Hume denied that there was, strictly speaking, a constitution at all before the Norman invasion. Miller, "Hume on Liberty," p. 57.

conclude, that the Saxons, who remained longer barbarous and uncivilized than those tribes [i.e., “the Franks, Burgundians, and other northern nations”], would never think of conferring such an extraordinary privilege on trade and industry.”⁸⁹ In other words, the development of the constitution is tied to the state of commerce (and in turn of the arts and sciences); a free government in which the authority of kings and lords is balanced by the power of the commons is not possible where society is uncultivated and barbarous. Similarly, justice was ill-administered in Anglo-Saxon England; Hume concluded that “notwithstanding the seeming liberty or rather licentiousness of the Anglo-Saxons, the great body even of the free citizens, in those ages, really enjoyed much less true liberty, than where the execution of the laws is the most severe . . . all anarchy is the immediate cause of tyranny, if not over the state, at least over many of the individuals.”⁹⁰ In a barbarous society, excessive liberty which is unregulated by laws leads to its opposite: tyranny, not of absolutist monarchs, but of powerful clan leaders over the people.

Norman Feudalism

Relative to the barbarism of Anglo-Saxon government and society, Hume regarded Norman rule since the conquest of 1066 as a civilizing influence on England. As the new king and barons were of French extraction, “foreign improvements . . . in literature and politeness, in laws and arts, seem now to have been, in a good measure, transplanted into England; and that kingdom was become little inferior, in all the fashionable accomplishments, to any of its neighbours on the continent.”⁹¹ From being a backwards people in Europe—as the Scots, Welsh, and Irish were to remain until much later, according to Hume—the English became, culturally, the equals of their European neighbours.

It was, however, a limited accomplishment considering the state of European civilization at the time. This point is particularly evident in Hume’s treatment of feudalism. He located the origins of feudalism in the customs of the ancient Germans, in which independent warriors formed allegiances with powerful chieftains, such that they swore to fight with

⁸⁹ Hume, *History of England*, 1:161–65.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:168–69. Wootton notes the “vast gulf” which separates us from our barbarous ancestors, according to Hume. Wootton, “Hume, ‘the historian’,” p. 469.

⁹¹ Hume, *History of England*, 1:371.

and for their chief in return for his favours. As the Germanic tribes conquered lands, the latter were apportioned by the chief to his retainers in exchange for their readiness to fight when required. Eventually, fiefs were substituted for military service in most cases.⁹² The beginnings, then, of feudal law in Germanic custom revealed its barbaric nature relative to modern law. This barbarism was reflected in the essentially military character of the rule of William I: "while his civil administration carried the face of a legal magistrate, his military institutions were those of a master and tyrant".⁹³ For William's design was not principally to enact legal and equitable government in England but rather to "depress or rather entirely extirpate the English gentry".⁹⁴ He could accomplish this aim by bestowing baronies on his retainers, who were Norman; and these barons would thus impose Norman rule on the English people by the authority of feudal law.

The barbarism of feudal law was further disclosed by the jurisdictional confusions it engendered. Commenting on the evolution of feudal law in the twelfth century as well as the clash between church and state in the reign of Henry II, Hume wrote:

intricacies of the feudal law had, in that age, rendered the boundaries of power between the prince and his vassals, and between one prince and another, as uncertain as those between the crown and mitre; and all wars took their origin from disputes, which, had there been any tribunal possessed of power to enforce their decrees, ought to have been decided only before a court of judicature.⁹⁵

Instead of a general system of law applying equally to the entire realm, feudalism bestowed tremendous but poorly defined powers to the barons. The history of Norman England "gives evident proofs of the disorders attending the feudal institutions: the licentiousness of the barons, their spirit of rebellion against the prince and laws, and of animosity against each other".⁹⁶ The feudal laws and institutions thus inculcated a licentious spirit particularly among the barons. Instead of the "true or regular liberty . . . which requires such improvement in knowledge and morals, as can only be the result of reflection and experience, and must grow to perfection during several ages of settled and established government", Norman England was characterized by licentiousness: an excessive liberty of

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1:456–58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1:192.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:203.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:326.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:372.

barons and lords. The Norman barons were incapable of providing a reasonable check on the monarchy, and instead tended to usurp excessive authority at the expense of king and people.⁹⁷ The benefits of Norman rule over the barbarous Britons were mixed: feudal law which partly civilized the English was tainted with barbarism, constituting a “mixture of liberty and oppression, order and anarchy, stability and revolution”.⁹⁸

The barbarity of the Norman constitution contributed to a low state of commerce and learning. The persecution of Jewish moneylenders as usurers reflected the “industry and frugality of this people” in contrast to the “idleness and profusion” of feudal Europeans.⁹⁹ Moreover, England’s participation in the Crusades revealed its lack of civilized virtue. Hume characterized the Crusades as “the most signal and most durable monument of human folly, that has yet appeared in any age or nation”, not just because of the plunder and slaughter of this “universal frenzy”,¹⁰⁰ but also because of the very goals of holy war. Far from depicting them as attempts to civilize the infidels to the east, Hume opined that the “advantage indeed of science, moderation, humanity, was entirely on the side of the Saracens” and praised Saladin’s gallantry and generosity, in contrast to the brave but “barbarian character” of Richard the Lion-hearted.¹⁰¹

The Crusades exemplified the fact that England and Europe were mired in ignorance and superstition. Hume’s hostility to the medieval Church in England was shown in his treatment of Henry II’s conflict with Thomas Becket after the latter was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. On questions of church and state, Hume favoured (alongside general religious toleration) religious establishment along the lines of the Anglican church, for “the union of civil and ecclesiastical power serves extremely, in every civilized government, to the maintenance of peace and order; and prevents those mutual incroachments, which, as there can be no ultimate judge between them are often attended with the most dangerous consequences.”¹⁰² Henry II wisely sought to limit the ecclesiastical power and even subordinate it to the civil power, given the tendency of priests to extend their privileges at the expense of the crown.¹⁰³ Hume largely excused Henry’s anger at Becket’s appeals to the Pope and censures of the

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:254.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:456.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:378–79.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:234–38.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1:393.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1:311.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1:314–15.

king, contrasting the “cautious measures of the king” with Becket’s “ambition and thirst of glory.” Even the tragic murder of Becket, arising from the assassins’ misconstruing Henry’s agitations to be a command of execution, did not prevent Hume from regarding Becket not as an exemplar of piety but as “the most lofty, intrepid, and inflexible spirit, who was able to cover, to the world and probably to himself, the enterprizes of pride and ambition, under the disguise of sanctity and of zeal for the interests of religion”. Becket’s hypocrisy and superstition were indicative of the times; Hume heaped scorn on the “endless panegyrics” to the memory of this supposed martyr, remarking that the greatest legislators and geniuses in history could not expect the praises bestowed upon such “pretended saints.”¹⁰⁴ Ecclesiastical interference with the civil power in this era and others was a species of barbarism.

Bolingbroke shared the Whig view of Magna Carta as a restoration of ancient liberties after the initial oppression of Norman rulers, and in turn of the 1688 Revolution settlement as a “new Magna Carta.”¹⁰⁵ Hume also regarded it as a significant advance for liberty, but his praise is qualified. The insurrection of barons in 1215 forced King John to convene a conference with the nobility. The resulting charter, Hume declared, “either granted or secured very important liberties and privileges to every order in the kingdom; to the clergy, to the barons, and to the people.” Certain privileges granted to the barons improved upon feudal law in clarifying ambiguities in the law and guaranteeing liberties against royal encroachments. Other clauses concerning the equal administration of justice, though made in the barons’ interests, benefited the entire realm.¹⁰⁶ The charter contributed to the security of liberty and property. But as Miller remarks, the privileges granted by the Magna Carta only increased baronial power in England.¹⁰⁷ Hume applauded the greater liberties gained in 1215, but the principal benefactors—the nobility—were as dangerous to security and liberty as tyrannical kings. After all, these freedoms derived “from the military power of many petty tyrants, who were equally dangerous to the prince and oppressive to the subject.”¹⁰⁸ Greater baronial liberty was won at the cost of popular liberty as well as sovereign authority. Hume

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1:332–37.

¹⁰⁵ Bolingbroke, *Dissertation*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Hume, *History of England*, 1:442–44.

¹⁰⁷ Miller, “Hume on Liberty,” p. 68. Wootton, however, detects a contractarian strain in Hume’s approval of the Magna Carta, despite Hume’s insistence on situating the charter “in a feudal and baronial context”. Wootton, pp. 470–71.

¹⁰⁸ Hume, *History of England*, 1:485.

emphasized that the feudal parliament was clearly exclusive of any representation of counties and boroughs: only “military tenants” were members of the legislative assembly. It is unreasonable, he added, that kings would consult tradesmen, for example, or even vassals, when the barons held the greatest power.¹⁰⁹ The Magna Carta did not change this or any other political institution; it may have improved the practice of feudalism, but did not escape the logic of feudalism, with its barbarous consequences for English culture. It may have become, with full establishment, “a kind of epoch in the constitution”¹¹⁰—i.e., as approaching nearer a state of security, justice, and liberty—but it was only an early epoch; for its promotion of baronial authority would plunge England into numerous rebellions and civil wars thereafter.

The Faint Dawn of Arts and Good Government

The later middle ages witnessed a movement away from the feudal constitution towards more modern forms. In general, the period between the signing of Magna Carta in 1215 and the defeat of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 was dominated by the power of the nobility. The rebellion of the 24 barons led by the Earl of Leicester (Simon de Montfort) in 1258 led not only to the usurpation of the crown but a subversion of the royal power in favour of a “newly erected oligarchy” of the baronial assembly.¹¹¹ These radical innovations entrenched the “aristocracy of arbitrary and turbulent ages” in the late feudal constitution, as Miller points out.¹¹² Likewise, in later reigns, the factious nobility rose up against the gentle, ineffectual Edward II because of their jealousy of his favourites—showing the weakness of monarchies “unacquainted with the office of a prime minister” who could make up for the monarch’s incompetence.¹¹³ Hume regarded the Wars of the Roses as the climactic struggle between powerful nobles at the end of the middle ages in England.

But such is the caprice of history, Hume suggested, that the turbulence of the nobility throughout the middle ages inadvertently gave rise to the commons as a greater part of the constitution. In 1265, Leicester sought

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:467–68.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1:488.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2:37–38.

¹¹² Miller, “Hume on Liberty,” p. 70.

¹¹³ Hume, *History of England*, 2:160.

to secure his power over the government through popular support. To this end, he assembled a new parliament consisting not only of lords and bishops but also knights from each shire and deputies from the boroughs, who had never been summoned before. This was the first appearance of an assembly resembling the House of Commons; thus a fundamental part of the constitution owed its existence to "so precarious and even so invidious an origin as Leicester's usurpation".¹¹⁴ Ironically, this baronial creation marked the distant beginning of feudalism's decline. Furthermore, the kings of England, imitating their European counterparts, tended to support the commons as a bulwark against the nobility in this period. In "encouraging and protecting the lower and more industrious orders of the state," the crown increased the "security and liberty to citizens, and made them enjoy unmolested the fruits of their industry."¹¹⁵ Out of self-interested motives, the late medieval kings of England advanced peace, liberty, and commerce.

In turn, the people acquired a greater confidence and zeal for liberty. By the time of the reign of Edward III in the fourteenth century, the commons frequently remonstrated against the court's arbitrary practices against the people. Thus the condition of the people's privileges and liberties was in fact better in this period than under the Tudors.¹¹⁶ Even the various popular rebellions in England and Europe showed that the "faint dawn of the arts and good government in that age, had excited the minds of the populace, in different states of Europe, to wish for a better condition, and to murmur against those chains, which the laws, enacted by the haughty nobility had so long impeded upon them." Hence, although the popular insurrections led by Wat Tyler and others were criminal and involved "the most outrageous violence," the requests of the rebels for pardon, the abolition of slavery, freedom of commerce, and fixed rent on lands were "extremely reasonable in themselves" and later complied with.¹¹⁷ Hume perceived the growth of a democratic popular culture.

In general, however, the late medieval English constitution was a "barbarous monarchy" lacking in regularity of laws and rights, such that the king, barons, commons, and clergy acted according to diverse and incompatible principles of government.¹¹⁸ Each of these orders acted against a

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:56–57.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:105.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:277.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:289–91.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:284.

regular constitution: not just tyrannical kings, but also ambitious nobles, a rebellious people, and seditious priests.¹¹⁹ This constitutional disorder reflected an essential barbarity in late medieval politics. In his criticism of the Duke of Lancaster's usurpation of the throne from Richard II in 1399, Hume contrasted these events with the revolution of 1688, emphasizing the "difference between a great and civilized nation, deliberately vindicating its established privileges, and a turbulent and barbarous aristocracy, plunging headlong from the extremes of one faction into those of another."¹²⁰ Although Richard Dees may see this comparison as evidence of Hume's thoroughgoing contextualism,¹²¹ we must keep in mind that Hume underscored the contrast between barbarism and civilization. After all, the reign of Henry IV, like that of most medieval kings, was characterized by the use of terror on the people; and medieval rulers showed little interest in promoting commerce and the arts.¹²² Furthermore, the superstitious fears and reverence raised by such figures as Joan of Arc indicated the ignorance of kings and nobility as well as commons.¹²³

On balance, this period showed new principles at work in English political life, but rather imperfectly. The Wars of the Roses, the final climactic event of this period, revealed a number of important political doctrines at issue: for example, the Lancastrians' reliance on the principle of established government to defend their right of succession, as opposed to the Yorkists' defence of good government and laws against the disorders resulting from the usurpation of Henry IV.¹²⁴ But the conflict was essentially a rivalry between opposing factions led by ambitious nobles. Similarly, although parliament's authority was becoming ascendant at this time, it failed to execute laws effectively not only because of "the licentious spirit of the aristocracy" but also due fundamentally to "the rude education of the age."¹²⁵ The late medieval age was for Hume a transitional period in human civilization, in which the slow emergence of European culture from its barbaric roots was manifest in the political history of England between 1215 and 1485. As he stressed, the "rise, progress, perfection, and decline of art and science, are curious objects of contemplation, and intimately connected with a narration of civil transactions." This

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2:174.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2:321.

¹²¹ Dees, "Contexts of Politics," p. 239.

¹²² Hume, *History of England*, 2:350–51.

¹²³ Ibid., 2:399–402.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2:436–38.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 2:453.

interpenetration of learning and political life in the culture of this time was particularly apparent in what Hume saw as a little noticed event which tended most to "the improvement of the age": the accidental discovery in 1130 of a copy of Justinian's Pandects, which gradually improved European jurisprudence.¹²⁶ Thus the progress of arts led to the progress of laws and freedom. Europe saw the introduction of personal liberty, in which the individual was considered free in his person and property.¹²⁷ But even this early accomplishment accruing from the decline of feudalism was mixed for Hume: for the "public liberty" which arises from the harmonious balance of the parts of the constitution was wholly absent, and would remain so throughout the succeeding Tudor dynasty.

Tudor Absolutism

Hume noted the growth of civilized culture in sixteenth-century Europe, precipitated by the great voyages of European discovery, the recovery of ancient learning, and the inventions of printing and gunpowder.¹²⁸ In England, these developments were accompanied by crucial changes in English law, most importantly the power granted (in the reign of Henry VII) to the nobility and gentry of breaking entails and alienating their estates: "By means of this law," Hume explained, "joined to the beginning luxury and refinements of the age, the great fortunes of the barons were gradually dissipated, and the property of the commons encreased in England."¹²⁹ While Hume later remarked that breaking entails was older than the time of Henry VII, he stressed the paramount importance of this law in decreasing the power of the nobility, particularly as they acquired "habits of luxury" in this more civilized age. As the fortunes of the nobility declined, that of the "middle rank of men" increased, eventually augmenting the power of the commons as representative of the interests of the propertied.¹³⁰ This law, alongside the "general revolution" in European

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2:518–20. See Miller, "Hume on Liberty," p. 72, and John W. Danford, "Hume's *History* and the Parameters of Economic Development," in Capaldi and Livingston, eds., *Hume's History of England*, p. 169.

¹²⁷ Hume, *History of England*, 2:522–24. I use "his" rather than "her" as more in keeping with Hume's context.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3:80–82.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 3:77.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 4:384. See Miller, "Hume on Liberty," p. 77.

manners, delivered the final blow to feudalism and baronial power, a necessary step to a free constitution.

But the very logic of this historical development in England meant that the reign of the Tudors was in fact a low point in the history of liberty. For “in the interval between the fall of the nobles and the rise of this order,” i.e., the commons, the Tudor sovereigns took advantage of the situation in assuming “an authority near absolute.”¹³¹ Tudor England combined cultural progress and liberal regress. The ebb of freedom was, however, suited to the as-yet largely uncultivated manners of the people. Thus in writing of the Star-Chamber, established by Henry VII and condemned especially in the seventeenth century as the epitome of unlawful discretionary power, Hume remarked that “the same maxims of government [which] suit such a rude people” are not “proper in a more advanced stage of society. The establishment of the Star-Chamber or the enlargement of its power . . . [in the reign of the Tudors] might have been as wise as the abolition of it in that of Charles I.”¹³² The absolute authority exercised by Tudor monarchs was justifiable given the acquiescence of parliament and a people who were not yet ready to be governed according to a free constitution: “the English in that age were so thoroughly subdued, that, like eastern slaves, they were inclined to admire those acts of violence and tyranny, which were exercised over themselves, and at their own expense.”¹³³ Tudor rulers exercised a violent, authoritarian government over an unruly populace unfitted for liberty.

Moreover, in the case of Henry VIII, the king’s despotic acts to ensure the religious supremacy of the crown were excessive but ultimately beneficial for English society. In the volume on the Tudors, Hume reiterated the necessity for an “ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community”¹³⁴—in contrast to excesses of Catholic “superstition” and Protestant “enthusiasm” which Hume criticized in both the *History* and *Essays*.¹³⁵ The Tudors’ efforts at religious establishment fell short of Hume’s ideal, however. In England, the commons initially supported “latitudinarian” sentiments in religion such as the belief in a supreme being who is author of nature and the encouragement of good morals. But the English soon manifested a zealous adherence to the

¹³¹ Hume, *History of England*, 4:384.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 3:469 n. B.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 3:323.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:335.

¹³⁵ See Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” in *Essays*, pp. 73–79.

various religious sects.¹³⁶ Hume was particularly critical of Henry VIII's engagement in theological controversy, which rather influenced the people themselves to study theology:¹³⁷ this worked against religious uniformity and inflamed sectarian opposition. Thus the superstition and enthusiasm in English society at this time were present at the highest levels; it was not Henry VIII's absolutism that was the central theologico-political problem but his superstitious and scholastic pretensions. More radically in the sixteenth century, Queen Mary's bigotry, ignorance, and religious zeal set off a wave of persecutions which resulted in the most "savage brutality."¹³⁸ Tudor English culture was characterized, then, not only by acquiescence in servility but also by the prevalence of religious fanaticism.

While other Whig historians celebrated Elizabeth's princely virtues in general, Bolingbroke singularly praised the reign of Elizabeth—in contrast to that of her predecessors—as marking a revival of English liberty, only to be suppressed under her Stuart successors.¹³⁹ Hume did allow that Elizabeth's accomplishments were considerable. After the turbulent reign of Mary, Elizabeth's accession ushered in a reign of relative peace and prosperity, and especially a departure from the superstition and ignorance in the monarchy itself. Nevertheless, her reign adhered closely to and even intensified crucial aspects of the political culture of Tudor absolutism, particularly in suppressing religious heresies and enforcing uniformity of public worship,¹⁴⁰ as well as restricting domestic and foreign commerce through the proliferation of monopolies and exclusive companies by crown grant.¹⁴¹ For Hume, Elizabeth's extensive prerogative displayed the worst tendencies of Tudor absolutism to stifle the progress of liberty and civilization.

Although Elizabeth was an oppressive monarch, especially in matters of religion and commerce, the spirit of liberty was not wholly extinguished in her reign. Parliament was generally slavish to the queen's will, with the exception of its puritan members. The spirit of liberty was fostered in its very opposition to the queen's arbitrary exercise of power. It was

¹³⁶ Hume, *History of England*, 3:186–87.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:290.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:437.

¹³⁹ See Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, 9:220–25; Laurence Echard, *The History of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1718), 1:903–4; Sir Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1733), p. 398; and Bolingbroke, *The Idea of a Patriot King*, in *Political Writings*, pp. 287–88.

¹⁴⁰ Hume, *History of England*, 4:10–11 and 208.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4:145 and 344–45.

to the puritans, with their laughable manners and absurd doctrines, “that the English owe the whole freedom of the constitution.” The puritans preserved the “precious spark of liberty” in their complaints against the crown, particularly when they were elected to a majority of seats in the House of Commons.¹⁴² Yet the next century would witness their utter subversion of the constitution, at least temporarily. How were the frenzy and ignorance of this sect consistent with their key role in advancing liberty? Hume argued in his essay “On Superstition and Enthusiasm” that enthusiastic religions, after their initial violence, become more “gentle and moderate.” Because of the absence of rites, ceremonies, and hierarchy, the adherents of puritanism tend to become indifferent to religious matters—unlike religions of superstition, in which the people are gradually and stealthily subjugated by priests who have entrenched themselves in society. Moreover, the religious enthusiasts have usually demanded religious freedoms of belief, conscience, and worship, unlike priestly opposition to such liberties.¹⁴³ Despite the utter absurdity of their beliefs and practices, the puritans’ championing of religious liberty had naturally translated to more enlarged liberties of thought and action. That such a ridiculous and initially destructive corruption should guarantee English freedom was, for Hume, demonstrative of the unintended benefits of enthusiasm.

Throughout the reigns of the Tudors, including Elizabeth, England witnessed an unprecedented absolutism in government. The progress of arts and learning in the sixteenth century civilized the English, but only the puritans (despite the absurdity of their doctrines) upheld the principles of liberty against the crown’s extensive prerogatives. Hume noted parliament’s “voluntary servitude” to the crown in acquiescing to such arbitrary institutions and powers as the Star-Chamber, High Commission, and martial law, as well as the frequent use of torture. Moreover, the popularity especially of Elizabeth’s reign showed that the nation as a whole willingly subjected itself to absolute government.¹⁴⁴ Thus the political culture of Tudor England was thoroughly absolutist and perhaps a form of despotism. Nevertheless, although the English government may have resembled Ottoman Turkey in some respects,¹⁴⁵ the general security of property and usually regular administration of justice in these times—as well as the “tacit check” to the crown from the absence of a standing army—led

¹⁴² Ibid., 4:145–46.

¹⁴³ Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” pp. 76–79.

¹⁴⁴ Hume, *History of England*, 4:358 and 366.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4:360.

Hume to conclude that the unlimited power of the Tudors was “exercised after the European manner,” i.e., not as a “despotic and eastern monarchy” where life, liberty, and property are wholly subject to despotic whim.¹⁴⁶ In other words, Tudor political culture, though radically imperfect in itself, was capable of transitioning to the idea of civilized, absolute monarchy; Stuart absolutism, then, followed the precedent set by the Tudor monarchs up to and including Elizabeth.

An Inconsistent Fabric

In the most controversial volume of the *History*, from the accession of James I to the execution of Charles I, Hume sought to find a moderate position between the opposing claims of republicans and monarchists—i.e., between the extremes of liberty and authority. For Hume, the seventeenth century manifested the peculiar duality of English political life. England's system of government as it arose in the seventeenth century was a balance between monarchical and republican parts: the first represented in the crown and lords, the second in the commons. But the balance, Hume argued, is never fixed: it must be constantly adjusted. Arising out of this dynamic conception of the constitution are people's opinions of the proper balance, as influenced by their “passions and prejudices.” Although “all reasonable men agree” on mixed government as best for Britain, milder persons will tend to support great power in the crown, while spirited persons who love liberty will be more sensitive to perceived encroachments of the crown on their freedoms.¹⁴⁷ Thus the existence of court and country parties was connected to the very fabric of the constitution. English, and later, British political culture involved the dynamic interplay of these opposing principles and interests.

England under the early Stuart kings bore witness to the emergence of this political culture. Hume described the “general, but insensible revolution” of ideas by the early seventeenth century in Europe: the spread of letters, the improvements in arts, the growth of navigation and secure travel, and especially the “enlarged and comprehensive” general system

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 4:370. While Wootton correctly emphasizes that “it was in the public interest that . . . [Tudor] despotism should give way, either to civilized absolutism or to a mixed constitution” (Wootton, “Hume, ‘the historian,’” 474), Hume also took care to distinguish Tudor rule from Eastern despotism as he and others in the eighteenth century saw it.

¹⁴⁷ Hume, “Of the Parties of Great Britain,” in *Essays*, pp. 64–65.

of European politics. The progress of civilization, of enlightenment in culture, led to new political ideas and practices. On the continent, princes discovered means of augmenting their discipline over the people through standing armies, while the love of freedom spread among the English, particularly “men of birth and education,” especially with the growing importance of the commons as they came to possess the balance of property. The change from a popular and absolute queen to a new dynasty suggested to many an opportunity to uphold the idea of limited government. The new king, however, was largely unaware of the significance of these changes in political thinking and “established in his own mind a speculative system of absolute government” based on heredity and divine right.¹⁴⁸ The stage was set for a conflict between partisans of liberty and those who defended the divine right of the sovereign.

Hume emphasized that the Stuarts were not tyrants who sought to overthrow clearly defined ancient liberties. Instead, they were successors to Tudor absolutism who failed to discern new political ideas arising in England as a result of the general revolution in learning. They were not enemies to the constitution but rather inheritors of “an inconsistent fabric, whose jarring and discordant parts must soon destroy each other, and from the dissolution of the old, beget some new form of civil government, more uniform and consistent.”¹⁴⁹ Neither the Stuart monarchs nor parliament could be wholly blamed for seeking to increase their powers against the other, because there were historical precedents supporting both sides. In other words, the modern British constitution had its origins in contradictory tendencies which had built up over centuries and came into outright conflict in the seventeenth century, when European learning was such that fully principled debate on constitutional change was possible.

Hume reconstructed the opposing positions in such a debate from the stance of the impartial reasoner. Often this figure is identified with the reasonable and moderate onlookers at the scene. These impartial reasoners share the view of the philosophical historian who is able to judge situations from a wider historical perspective. After all, Hume wrote, the historian has a “lively conception of all the incidents”, and enters deeply “into the concerns of the persons: Represents to himself their actions, and characters, and friendships, and enmities”¹⁵⁰—as if he were there. In

¹⁴⁸ Hume, *History of England*, 5:18–19 and 40.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5:59.

¹⁵⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, 1:1.3.7, pp. 68–69.

this section of the *History*, Hume wrote of the “wise and moderate in the nation” who maintained “an equitable neutrality between the opposing parties”, regarding “the very rise of parties as a happy prognostic of the establishment of liberty”, but fearing for the consequences of the parties’ inability to reconcile their positions.¹⁵¹ The impartial spectator regarded the rise of court and country parties as indicative of a free constitution with republican and monarchical parts, and would have noted with trepidation that at this formative stage of the modern constitution, the parties were likely to clash violently.¹⁵²

Under such conditions, the defeat of the monarchy in the ensuing civil war resulted in an excessive liberty. In the shift from the absolutist monarchy of Charles I to the “pure democracy” of the Long Parliament by 1640, popular leaders whipped up the passions of the people. Invoking his idea of sympathy, Hume described how “popular affections were communicated from breast to breast” while the pulpits of puritan preachers “resounded with faction and fanaticism” and the press produced nothing but “noise and fury, cant and hypocrisy” in this “tumult of various prejudices and passions.”¹⁵³ The victory of the Roundheads unleashed a popular frenzy. Unlike the excessive freedom of pre-feudal England, for example, the excessive liberty won by the English at this time was fuelled by religious enthusiasm and in support of republican principles of government.

A New Epoch in the Constitution

The anarchy unleashed by the civil war, followed by Cromwell’s dictatorship, purged the culture of fanaticism. Hume credited Cromwell with attempting to quell the factionalism and general confusion in English society and government; but these efforts were enacted through a “military and despotic government, exercised not in the legal manner of European nations, but according to the maxims of eastern tyranny.”¹⁵⁴ While the Stuarts and Tudors had tended to augment their authority more in the

¹⁵¹ Hume, *History of England*, 5:95. Wootton writes that “[t]he history was written from the point of view of such disinterested individuals, whose concern was with the public good.” Wootton, “Hume, ‘the historian,’” pp. 471–72.

¹⁵² Wexler notes the tension between interpretation and disinterested observation, which Hume was aware of and sought to alleviate through his impartial historical writing. Wexler, “Hume’s Discovery,” 198.

¹⁵³ Hume, *History of England*, 5:293–95.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6:74.

fashion of absolutist monarchs in Europe than “Eastern despots,” Cromwell’s regime was largely consistent with the latter. For Cromwell’s abilities were not employed towards any specific end other than the acquisition of power; and his power was based on the might of an army, which “is so forcible, and yet at the same time so coarse a weapon.”¹⁵⁵ The shock of life under Cromwell’s government from 1653–58 was enough to convince the people of the consequences of toppling the monarchy. Hume wrote that “no people could undergo a change more sudden and entire in their manners than did the English nation during this period [from Charles I’s reign to the Commonwealth]. From tranquillity, concord, submission, sobriety, they passed in an instant to a state of faction, fanaticism, rebellion, and almost frenzy”¹⁵⁶ as a result of political and religious extremism. But the change in manners from the civil war to the restoration was equally dramatic; a people so animated by the spirit of liberty were hardly content with the extreme despotism of republican rule, which explained their elation at the restoration of the monarchy. They came to understand that the very enjoyment of their personal liberties was not possible under a regime which subverted the constitution, the basis of all law. Thus over the succeeding reigns, the people “were, in a great measure, cured of that wild fanaticism, by which they had formerly been so agitated.”¹⁵⁷

After the restoration of the monarchy, the excessive abuses of the crown’s authority in the reign of Charles II once again fostered a passion for liberty in the people, which had important effects on English politics. As a consequence of the “Popish plot” of the pro-Catholic and pro-French “Cabal” of the king’s inner council of five ministers, the people re-elected the “zealots of the former parliament”, especially Presbyterians who inveighed most loudly against the Catholics and their supposed influence at court.¹⁵⁸ The 1679 parliament thus became particularly active in the exclusion crisis over the question of crown succession. More fundamentally, the parties in parliament were transformed by this new spirit of liberty, which was chastened by the civil war but nevertheless resistant to arbitrary government. The country party which opposed absolute monarchy was animated more by partisan than religious zeal; they had learned the violent consequences of religious enthusiasm and dropped pretences to godliness and purity, which ensured a greater moderation in their manners. The court party, meanwhile, united “indifferent and impartial

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 6:109.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 6:141.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 6:539.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 6:356–57.

persons to the crown" who feared the consequences of fanaticism.¹⁵⁹ The new names acquired by these parties, namely Whig and Tory, may have been terms of reproach,¹⁶⁰ but denoted a substantial shift: the Whigs and Tories were less extreme in their principles than their Roundhead and Cavalier forerunners. Instead of fanatical zealots of liberty opposed to advocates of absolute monarchy, the Whigs and Tories (at least by 1688) showed themselves to be, respectively, "lover[s] of liberty though without renouncing monarchy" and "lover[s] of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty".¹⁶¹

Thus the contrast between the 1688 bloodless revolution and the revolution of the 1640s and 50s reflected a new culture of liberty regulated by law. James II's "arbitrary disposition, and the bigotry of his principles"¹⁶² were soon to incite the opposition of both parties in parliament. They were predisposed to tolerate the king's extension of prerogative, out of concern for the consequences of resisting the crown, but it was apparent to them that he intended "to invade the constitution, to threaten their religion, to establish a standing army, and even to require them, by their concurrence, to contribute towards all these measures". If the new king had been more prudent or had not threatened their religion, Hume conjectured, the people might have acquiesced in the king's authority. But their fear of "popery," particularly after Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, stirred their animosity towards the crown.¹⁶³ Unlike the civil war, in which royalists and parliamentarians (and later the army) were in conflict, James II was opposed by the entire nation: the Whigs readily opposed his absolutist rule, while the Tories, "finding their past services forgotten, their rights invaded, their religion threatened, agreed to drop for the present all over-strained doctrines of submission, and attend to the great and powerful dictates of nature."¹⁶⁴ Both parties agreed to defend their national religion and an "established liberty" consistent with the rule of law;¹⁶⁵ that such a moderate position was acceptable to both court and

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6:376–77.

¹⁶⁰ As Hume noted, "Whig" refers to "fanatical conventiclers in Scotland", "Tory" to "popish banditti in Ireland." Hume, *History of England*, 6:381.

¹⁶¹ Hume, "Parties of Great Britain," pp. 70–71.

¹⁶² Hume, *History of England*, 6:451.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 6:468–70.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 6:502–3.

¹⁶⁵ See Hume, "Of the Coalition of Parties," in *Essays*, p. 501. As Wootton remarks, "after the Restoration, Charles II and James II had no excuse for failing to recognize that England was now a limited monarchy." Wootton, "Hume, 'the historian'," p. 473.

country parties indicated the greater enlightenment of post-restoration culture relative to the religious and political fanaticism of its predecessor.

The 1688 revolution, in which James II was deposed, a Protestant succession secured, and the rights of parliament entrenched, marked the birth of a fundamentally new constitution and thus a new English political culture. Only with the revolution was a “uniform edifice . . . at last erected” wherein the “monstrous inconsistency, so visible between the ancient Gothic parts of the fabric and the recent plans of liberty, was finally corrected: And to their mutual felicity, king and people were finally taught to know their proper boundaries.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, the revolution did not restore the ancient constitution but rather constructed a uniform modern constitution out of the parts of the previous ones.

Unfortunately, the English convention to settle the constitution—in effect, to set down by what principles the revolution and Protestant succession were justified—obscured the achievement of the events of 1688. The majority of commons and peers agreed, erroneously, that James II had broken the original contract between king and people, and debated over topics “so frivolous; more resembling the verbal disputes of the schools than the solid reasonings of statesmen and legislators.”¹⁶⁷ For Hume, the actors of the Glorious Revolution failed to discern the precise significance of what they were doing. It was left to the philosophical historian to demonstrate the singularity and modernity of the revolution. Hume argued that the proponents of contract theory failed to account for the fact that in “great revolutions of government, and new settlements of civil constitutions,” there is so much “violence, tumult, and disorder, that the public voice can scarcely ever be heard”, but that the 1688 revolution was “a singular exception to this observation.”¹⁶⁸ That is to say, James II did not breach an original contract but rather acted against a constitution which was coming into being; he was opposed by the opinion and sentiment of the English people of his time. A revolution which reconciled liberty and authority in the English constitution was only possible at that particular moment in the history of England. It was not coincidental that the increase in commerce between the Restoration and 1688 revolution was the greatest in English history, propelled by European trade and the extension of the colonies in America,¹⁶⁹ nor that this period witnessed

¹⁶⁶ Hume, *History of England*, 6:475–76.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6:526.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:528.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6:537–38.

tremendous achievements in the sciences (including those of Wren, Wallis, Hooke, Boyle, and especially Newton).¹⁷⁰ The Glorious Revolution was above all a product of civilized culture.

Conclusion

Hume's *History of England* was not intended to be a triumphalist narrative of Britain's path to greatness. While he esteemed the English constitution for its balancing of crown and parliament and of authority and liberty, his praise was qualified: "it may be justly be affirmed, without any danger of exaggeration, that we, in this island, have ever since [1688] enjoyed, if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind."¹⁷¹ There is evidence that he did not think it the best system of government: his essay "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" sets out a republican ideal of government resembling more the Netherlands than the mixed government of Britain.¹⁷² Of course, Hume argued that an established government is infinitely preferable to an imaginary one; but as any government always changes, Hume predicted that the delicate balance of the British constitution might well be undone, and that an absolute monarchy would be a preferable "euthanasia" for the British constitution than a republic (judging from the experience of English history).¹⁷³ Indeed, while the eighteenth-century constitution reflected for Hume an advanced, liberal culture in Britain, the succession of political cultures in the history of England should indicate that the balance of liberty and authority cannot last forever. In his declining years, Hume detected signs of Britain's decline: especially the factionalism and license evident in the Wilkes affair, as well as the deleterious effects (both faction and debt) of a possible war between Britain and her American colonies.¹⁷⁴ By 1773, Hume lamented to his publisher that England "is a stupid, factious Nation, with whom I am heartily disgusted. . . . that Nation

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 6:541–42.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 6:531.

¹⁷² See Hume, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," in *Essays*, pp. 512–29.

¹⁷³ Hume, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," in *Essays*, pp. 51–53.

¹⁷⁴ See J.G.A. Pocock, "Hume and the American Revolution: the Dying Thoughts of a North Briton," in David Fate Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade L. Robison, eds., *McGill Hume Studies* (Montreal, 1979), pp. 339–40.

is so sunk in Stupidity and Barbarism and Faction that you may as well think of Lapland for an Author.”¹⁷⁵

Despite his low opinion of England in the late eighteenth century, Hume conceded that it was an Englishman, not a Scot, who would take up the mantle of enlightened historiography. Writing to Gibbon in 1776 upon perusal of the first volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Hume commented that “as it seems to me that your Countrymen, for almost a whole Generation, have given themselves up to barbarous and absurd Faction, and have totally neglected all polite Letters, I no longer expected any valuable Production ever to come from them.”¹⁷⁶ Ironically, Gibbon’s history has enjoyed greater recognition than Hume’s in subsequent centuries. Hume’s *History of England* was a significant predecessor to Gibbon’s philosophical history, particularly its enlightened narrative of the decline and fall of ancient civilization into barbarism and superstition in the middle ages, succeeded by the re-emergence of liberty, commerce, arts, and sciences in the modern world;¹⁷⁷ but how does the work stand in its own right? Historiographically, it lacks the scope and richness found in Gibbon’s work, given its focus on the history of a single country and reliance on printed sources, as noted above. More generally, it is constrained by Hume’s political philosophy which frames and structures the historical narrative: it expounds a history of the English constitution and tends to align and often subordinate all other facets of social and political life to that history.

Philosophically, *The History of England* is limited by its bourgeois horizons. While the work significantly departs from Whig historiography in its consideration of civilized monarchy and critique of social contract theory, and benefits from an awareness of shifting political cultures over time, its evaluative standards are nevertheless confined to a conception of enlightened civil society which was already in question by Rousseau and others by the time of its writing.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Hume’s concern for impartiality relative to Whig and Tory principles and prejudices and his account of English

¹⁷⁵ Hume, *Letters*, 2:269. Hume criticized Turgot’s theory of linear progress, citing England’s decline: *Letters*, 2:180.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:310.

¹⁷⁷ See Pocock, *Barbarism*, section III; and Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997).

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, Grace Roosevelt, “An Alternative to Economic Man: The Limitation of Desire in Rousseau’s *Emile*,” and Simon Kow, “Rousseau’s Mandevillian Conception of Desire and Modern Society,” in *Rousseau and Desire*, ed. Mark Blackell, John Duncan, and Simon Kow (Toronto, 2009), pp. 46–81.

history as the struggle to balance liberty and authority in the constitution failed to consider alternative visions which might transcend the parameters of English social and political life up to the eighteenth century. Gibbon's *History* may be regarded as building upon (though outshining) Hume's *History of England* as a product of Enlightenment historiography, but the works of such thinkers as Herder and Hegel would go far beyond Hume's philosophical history in critically evaluating the achievements of the Enlightenment and investigating the very nature of history itself.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ My thanks go to Edward Andrew for his cogent commentary on an early version of this chapter in the form of a paper presented at a meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, and to Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling for their very helpful comments and suggestions on the drafts of this chapter.

3. WILLIAM ROBERTSON: THE MINISTER AS HISTORIAN

Jeffrey Smitten

On Sunday afternoon, 27 January 1760, William Robertson preached a sermon as usual in Lady Yester's Chapel in Edinburgh, where he had been minister for two years following his 14-year ministry in the rural parish of Gladsmuir. Among the parishioners that day was Sir David Dalrymple, attorney and prominent landholder, who attended many of Robertson's sermons during the 1750's and 1760's. Dalrymple also recorded the major heads of Robertson's sermons¹ because Robertson commanded respect as a preacher, and he was a celebrity, enjoying the huge critical success of his first book, *The History of Scotland during the Reign of James V and Mary, Queen of Scots*, which he had published almost exactly one year before on 1 February. As Dugald Stewart observed, the publication of this history meant Robertson "saw independence and affluence within his reach."² But, on this Sunday, Robertson chose as his text Ephesians 5:14 ("Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light"). The sermon examined the motives for obeying this injunction, the last and most important of which was "the promise of immortality." Dalrymple noted Robertson's comment on this point: "Reason's feeble hand endeavors to withdraw the vail [*sic*] which is between us and the unknown world of spirits—but she is not able. [H]er discoveries [*sic*] are imperfect. But life & immortality are brought to light by y^e Gospel of Jesus." The historian, who had successfully demonstrated the power of his genius and opened, in Stewart's words, a pathway for "interest and ambition," proclaims the superior power of faith that shrinks worldly accomplishments to nothing beside the "promise of immortality" and the overwhelming importance of the Gospel message. Perhaps Dalrymple, who had assisted Robertson with his history³ and had heard a

¹ National Library of Scotland [hereafter NLS] MS 25,411.

² *Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, gen. ed. Richard B. Sher, 12 vols. (1801; repr. London, 1996), 12:112. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

³ See, for example, Robertson to Dalrymple, 22 October 1753, NLS MS 25,294, fols. 7; 26 August 1756, fols. 37–38; 26 July 1757, fols. 55–56; 18 November 1757, fols. 57–58; and 8 November 1758, fols. 74–75.

number of his sermons, asked himself the obvious question: what connection do Robertson's two rather different careers—as minister and as historian—bear to each other?

Until recently, students of historiography have not always paid attention to Robertson's ministerial career and its relation to his historical writing, despite the fact that he spoke from a mainstream position, which embraced both faith and reason.⁴ However, given the current interest in a Christian Enlightenment to set beside the one based on modern paganism popularized by Peter Gay, the time seems right to consider more concretely and biographically than has been done how religion and history coexist in Robertson's thinking.⁵ Of the three major British historians working in the latter half of the eighteenth century, only William Robertson came to history through theology.⁶ The others, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, shared Voltaire's assumption of a profound tension between human progress and divine providence.⁷ Hume, who early established himself as

⁴ As one recent historian declared, "Respectable intellectual opinion was far removed from the arguments of Hume or Voltaire that the best way to understand human experience was on its own terms, or that history might be more effectively written within the frameworks of human agency and blind chance" (Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* [Cambridge, 2007], p. 57). Nonetheless, there are valuable discussions of Robertson and his religious views to which I am much indebted, including Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton, 1985); David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1993), esp. pp. 208–210; Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), esp. pp. 122–128; Nicholas Phillipson, "Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson," in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 55–73; Colin Kidd, "Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (2004), 502–519; and J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), and *Barbarism and Religion: Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁵ For a survey, see Helena Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. VII: *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 283–301. The problems raised by bringing religion into the Enlightenment are explored in Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *American Historical Review* 108 (2003), 1061–80. An exemplary study of an important figure close to Robertson working in the Christian Enlightenment tradition is Jonathan Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life and Thought of John Erskine* (Oxford, 2011). Peter Gay's work is *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966–69).

⁶ I owe the phrase to David B. Horn, "Principal William Robertson, D.D., Historian," *University of Edinburgh Journal* 18 (1956), 158. See also Kidd, "Subscription," who argues persuasively that the Scottish Moderates wrote history instead of theology.

⁷ For a convenient summary of Voltaire's thinking, see Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1948), chap. 5.

a skeptical philosopher with the *Treatise of Human Nature* and a skeptical historian with the *History of England*, teased Robertson about “the godly Strain of his History.”⁸ The irony of Gibbon’s notorious fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* declared his skeptical position, in which divine power and wisdom are replaced by “the inevitable mixture of error and corruption” in Christian history.⁹ Unlike his colleagues, Robertson saw no inherent conflict between progress and providence. Born into a clerical household and attending the University of Edinburgh with the intent of entering the ministry, he was ordained and served as a parish minister in Gladsmuir and in Edinburgh for nearly 50 years. Likewise, as principal of the University of Edinburgh, he was ultimately responsible for the training of Scottish ministers as well as for leadership in the Church of Scotland.¹⁰ Consequently, to understand Robertson’s thinking as an historian, we must begin with the religious context in which he lived and thought every day of his life. But, as his histories demonstrate, we must also see Robertson as a man of the Enlightenment, who recognized the powerful claims of reason in historical writing. Unlike the skeptical Hume and Gibbon, however, Robertson wished to conjoin reason and faith, not separate them. As Ian D.L. Clark has said,

one of the most noticeable features of Moderate preaching is its insistence that what God has joined man should not put asunder. Faith-and-works, revelation-and-reason, divinity-and-humanity, truth-and-charity were all units of thought rather than (as in so many Evangelical sermons) antitheses.¹¹

For Robertson, we should add religion-and-history as another unit of thought that should not be split apart. Whether he addresses evangelicals or skeptics, he asserts the claims of both parts of this union because in his eyes religion gains strength and relevance by being understood within the context of history, and history gains credibility and moral scope by its conjunction with religion.

Although the scholars who have discussed Robertson’s religious context have followed Clark’s lead in asserting the harmony of reason and

⁸ Hume to Hugh Blair, 25 March 1766, in *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Grieg, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), 2:31.

⁹ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, 3 vols. (London, 1994), 1:446.

¹⁰ Brief modern accounts of Robertson’s multifaceted career include Stewart J. Brown, “William Robertson (1721–1793) and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *William Robertson*, pp. 7–35; and my account in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹¹ “Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland 1752–1805,” unpub. thesis, Cambridge, 1964, p. 242.

faith in Robertson's thinking, the sources of this idea have not been fully examined, nor has enough attention been paid to the ways in which he expresses this union through style, structure and choice of subject. Accordingly, this chapter will first examine some of the patterns of his thinking in his non-historical writings in order to show how Robertson negotiates issues of faith and reason. It will then take some specific examples from his four histories and read them against what we know of his religious thought to see how it is implicated in the histories. The handling of religion in the histories is problematic. On the one hand, as Nicholas Phillipson has said, we know very little about Robertson's religious beliefs.¹² On the other, it is easy to misread the histories by ignoring or minimizing the religious context from which they emerged.¹³ Robertson did not have a rigorous philosophy of history based on religion, but he did, throughout his career, imply a religious context for historical events. Thus, this essay will trace how, in his histories, Robertson turned Moderate religious values¹⁴ into artistic ones, creating the literary form, style, and subject he believed consistent with a polite commercial society. His histories try to capture the true course of events by probable reasoning, but at the same time they remind his readers, by implication, of the place of those events in a larger providential context based on faith. To echo Clark, Robertson thus puts together what Voltaire would put asunder.

To begin to understand how religion and history are connected for Robertson, we must look first to his father. The Reverend William Robertson, after whom the historian was named, had been licensed to preach by the presbytery of Kirkcaldy in 1711; and, after being ordained to a congregation in London, apparently the Scots Church at London Wall (also known as Founders' Hall),¹⁵ he was translated to Borthwick, East Lothian,

¹² "Providence and Progress," p. 55.

¹³ For example, see David Spadafora's account of Robertson's thinking about progress in *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven 1990), esp. pp. 374–77. Spadafora believes Robertson over his career makes a transition from a religious account of progress to a secular one that displaces it. The purpose of this essay is to see religion and history as a consistently associated in Robertson's thinking and suggest the impossibility of Robertson's adopting a wholly secular account of history.

¹⁴ The term "Moderate" refers to the Moderate Party within the Church of Scotland during the latter half of the eighteenth century of which Robertson was the acknowledged leader at least until 1780. It refers to a distinct style of churchmanship, consistent with the notion of a Christian Enlightenment, which attempted to steer between skepticism and fanaticism while embracing both Presbyterian beliefs and new forms of secular thinking. See the fine summary in Sher, *Church and University*, pp. 324–28.

¹⁵ Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scotticae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, 11 vols. to date (Edinburgh, 1915–), 1:40; Henry Brougham,

in 1714. His period of service at Founders' Hall seems to have left a strong impression that he would pass on to his son. From 1698 to 1716 the church was under the charge of Robert Fleming (ca. 1660–1716), and the elder Robertson was assigned to be his assistant. The charismatic Fleming, who was versed in Dutch and Continental Arminian thought, seems to have led Robertson to adopt a distinctive flexibility and openness in his view of religious doctrine, which would be important in shaping the outlook of the historian.¹⁶ Fleming's views were characterized by Joshua Oldfield in his funeral sermon on Fleming when he declared,

If in some Things he [Fleming] differ'd from others, it may well be allow'd him, who was always free in allowing others the Liberty to differ from him, without any rough or injurious Treatment. He held to the Motto which he had chose [*sic*] for himself, *Liberè sed modestè*, which might be rendered in the Way of Paraphrase, Be as Free as you please, so you be as Modest as you're Free.¹⁷

With his appointment in 1714, the elder Robertson apparently brought similarly flexible sentiments to Borthwick and later to Edinburgh when he was translated to Old Greyfriars in 1734.¹⁸

The elder Robertson's tolerant approach to theological controversy was embodied in his library, which drew the notice of his son's long-time colleague minister, John Erskine. Erskine noted that "Liberality of mind gave a place in his library, which, though small, was well chosen, to authors, whose scheme of divinity, and ideas of the most profitable manner of preaching, were very different from his own; and what might be learned from them, he candidly pointed out to his son."¹⁹ These authors included Continental Arminian theologians, such as Samuel Werenfels, Philip Limborch, and the younger Turretine; and they led the young Robertson to adopt "some of their peculiar sentiments and modes of expression, not relished by many Calvinists," though never straying beyond the bounds of the Westminster Confession. But what these Arminian divines did provide the younger and the older Robertson was a model of modesty in making

Lives of Men of Letters and Science, in *Works*, 12: 256; George G. Cameron, *The Scots Kirk in London* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 23, 240.

¹⁶ Walter Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster, and Southwark*, 4 vols. (London, 1808), 2:468–87.

¹⁷ *Funeral Sermon upon the Much Lamented Death of... Mr. Robert Fleming* [London, 1716], p. 37.

¹⁸ See the brief but suggestive comments of Robert Wodrow, *Analecta; or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1843), 4:238, 239.

¹⁹ *The Agency of God in Human Greatness* (1801), repr. in *Works*, 12:264.

judgments.²⁰ The father left six sermons in manuscript, one of which (the fourth in the collection) he published as *Ministers Ought to Please God, Rather Than Men*.²¹ Despite his difference from these Arminian divines, Robertson seemed impressed by their moderation because this sermon, addressing a potentially inflammatory topic, is a masterpiece of careful balance of reason and passion: “let it be our Endeavour,” he declares in the sermon, “first to set Truth in as clear a Light as we can; and then, *if possible* [my emphasis], to make our Audience feel the force of it” (28). Robertson first builds his case with a careful, rational assessment of how ministers must avoid extremes and embrace peace. Their task is to determine exactly when and how ministers ought to please God rather than men. Only in the last part of the sermon, with the rational foundation laid, does he exhort his audience to a sincere and deep love of God. Meanwhile, we know that the son’s preferred Arminian divine, Samuel Werenfels, also argued for modesty in making judgments:

For, let Descartes’s Precept of disbelieving, tend ever so much to perplex our Understandings, and by that means to tempt them to despair of knowing any thing, because some things are not to be understood; and to demand Certainty, where only Probability is to be had; Notwithstanding all this, I say, my Rule holds good, and has not one ill Consequence attending it. For, be the Controversy of ever so great Importance, what Harm is there in deferring to judg [sic], whether it be concerning things really different, or only about Words ill-express’d and misunderstood, till I am more satisfactorily inform’d of the Matter; tho that shou’d not happen till Doomsday?²²

Like his father, Robertson believed the limits of human knowledge require us to be cautious and balanced in our judgments, always regarding our conclusions as provisional and proportioned to the evidence available. But caution and modesty do not aim at skepticism. Rather, they are in the service of a faith, which, even if it cannot be wholly substantiated by reason at a given moment, should nonetheless be sincerely embraced.

²⁰ The significance of these Arminian theologians for the Enlightenment and, by implication, Robertson is discussed in Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,” in his *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays* (New York, 1969), pp. 193–239. Their specific relevance to Robertson is explored in my “The Shaping of Moderation: William Robertson and Arminianism,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 22 (1992), 281–300.

²¹ The manuscript is Edinburgh University Library [hereafter EUL] MS ROB 4. The sermon was published in Edinburgh in 1737.

²² *A Discourse of Logomachys, or Controversy about Words* (London, 1711), pp. 159–60. Erskine notes Robertson’s preference for Werenfels in *Works*, 12:264, n.b.

When the young Robertson, his habits of thought having been shaped by his father, entered the University of Edinburgh as a student in 1735, he developed these ideas in new contexts. An important example is a student essay he submitted to John Stevenson in the spring of 1737 entitled “De probabilitate historica, sive evidentia moralis.”²³ It suggests that in the epistemology of historical investigation, Robertson, like his father, had adopted a balanced middle-ground position. On the one hand, Robertson counters claims of absolute certainty by arguing that much of our knowledge is of necessity uncertain. On the other, he denies skepticism by claiming that the world is accessible to reason. Instead, history must always be investigated, he implies, with both modesty and reason so that the historian’s truth claim is proportioned to the degree of certainty of the evidence. This rule was to govern all his historical practice.

Robertson discusses evidence of which we have “no absolute certainty” (8), distinguishing the varying degrees of belief that we can place in such ideas.²⁴ That topic alone is significant because one of the key issues between Calvinists and anti-Calvinists was precisely how much faith can be put in merely probable ideas.²⁵ To what extent, in other words, can we rely on the light of nature as opposed to the light of faith? Robertson does not address revealed truth directly, though he does allow that “the greatest and most useful part of our learning and knowledge, the truth about what has been done, and whatever can be comprehended under the name of history, even including faith in our most holy Christian religion, depends on and is sustained by testimony of this sort, as on a foundation (of a building)” (8). The image of the foundation of a building (“fundamento nititur & sustentatur”) implies that probable reasoning supports both religion and history. From this starting point, he goes on to distinguish six forms of evidence in historical probability, concluding: “Evidence of this kind, therefore, does not seize nor compel our assent as mathematical evidence normally does, but most certainly it wins it” (11). But Robertson then turns to confront an important religious question. Why is it that human nature

²³ The manuscript is preserved as EUL MS Dc.4.54, pp. 16–20. Citation is to the translation by Mark Damen printed in *Works*, vol. 12.

²⁴ Robertson’s argument is a condensation of Book IV, chapters 13–20, of Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Indeed, Robertson’s method of thought throughout his career may be described as an incorporation of Locke into his Presbyterian beliefs.

²⁵ These issues are argued in, for example, Robert Wallace, *The Regard Due to Divine Revelation, and to Pretences to It, Considered* (London, 1733), and James Bannatine, *Mistakes about Religion amongst Causes for Our Defection from the Spirit of the Gospel* (Edinburgh, 1737).

has the capacity to give rational assent to probable evidence? “[W]e must admit,” he argues, “this faculty has been given to us for this reason, that we use it in investigating the truth, and once it has been found, in embracing it” (12). The world is knowable through probable reasoning, and therefore rational investigation will confirm the revealed truth of God’s goodness because “it would afflict the infinite perfections of God with most grievous insult, if we were to suspect him of having created an animal so crude, so shameless, so misshapen, that obscurity motivated its faculties, and uncertainty by itself could determine its course of action” (13). “God the Best and Greatest” (12) has created an ultimate harmony between reason and faith, which together provide the sum of human knowledge, a position Robertson would never relinquish.²⁶

Some years later, Robertson’s view of the harmony of faith and reason was put to the test. In 1751, some seven years into his Gladsmuir ministry, Robertson faced a conflict that would beset the Church of Scotland until the Disruption of 1843: the patronage controversy.²⁷ Patronage gave local landowners who held traditional rights of patronage the power to appoint parish ministers over the wishes or preferences of parishioners. The patronage law was often resisted, however. Robertson, together with a committee of young clergy, including Hugh Blair, John Home, and Alexander Carlyle, joined by several lay elders, moved to establish the authority of the General Assembly to resolve patronage disputes, thus marking the beginning of the Moderate party’s regime in the Church of Scotland. Robertson and Home were chosen to speak on behalf of a measure to punish the minister and presbytery of Linlithgow for their resistance to the General Assembly. The measure failed, but Robertson made an impressive speech that “not only Gain’d the attention of the Assembly, but Drew the Praise of the best Judges.”²⁸ Another case followed several months later, when the presbytery of Dunfermline refused a ministerial appointment of the General Assembly. This time Robertson and several of his closest associates published *Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence and Resolution of the Commission of the General Assembly*.²⁹ The pamphlet was said to be originally the work of Robertson but further developed by others on his

²⁶ For example, he would declare in a sermon of 6 January 1760, according to Dalrymple’s notes, “that we do not live in a world of anarchy & confusion” and “that we have by y^e light of reason and more so by revelation, knowledge of what is fit & certainty of God protecting us” (NLS MS 25,411, fol. 63).

²⁷ I am indebted to the fuller discussion in Sher, *Church and University*, pp. 45–64.

²⁸ Alexander Carlyle, *Autobiography*, ed. John Hill Burton (London, 1910), p. 126.

²⁹ I cite the version printed in *Works*, vol. 12.

committee. The pamphlet appeared just prior to the General Assembly in May 1752, and this time the Moderates' measure carried. This was an important moment for the Moderates because they confronted a basic philosophic issue at stake in the patronage controversy: how can the historical church accommodate the claims of revealed truth? The task for Robertson was to keep a connection between the provisional realm of reason/history and the absolute realm of religion/faith. Robertson first distinguishes human beings as individuals from human beings considered as members of society. The first "have no Guide but their own Understanding, and no Judge but their own Conscience" (31). But as members of society, there is the added obligation to "follow the Judgment of Society." Robertson then invokes the *Confession of Faith* 1.6, which makes a similar distinction between the "inward illumination of the Spirit of God" necessary to the understanding of the word and circumstances in the worship of God and the government of the church "common to human Actions and Societies, which are to be ordered by the Light of Nature and Christian Prudence" (33). Given this distinction, the conclusion is obvious:

We allow to the Right of private Judgment, all the Extent and Obligation, that Reason or Religion require. But we can never admit, that any Man's private Judgment, gives him a Right, to disturb with Impunity, all publick Order. [35]

The constitution of the Church of Scotland therefore ought to be maintained in its ancient purity because it is the agreed upon arrangement for handling the light of faith alongside the light of nature. The parallel with "De probabilitate historica" seems clear. In the same way that the sum of human knowledge rests on the ultimate harmony of sacred and secular truths, so the preservation of the true church depends on both the light of nature and the illumination of the spirit. But this conjunction rests, as it logically must, on a prior separation of reason from faith. In both cases Robertson carefully marks a boundary that allows him to foreground the more secular issue (probable reasoning or subordination) and place in the background the issue of faith. But secular and sacred are not pitted against each other, as Gibbon or Hume might have done. Instead, Robertson argues the secular questions in the context of faith and embraces both.

Robertson's next publication also looks at faith in the context of history; however, this time he positions himself to speak as a sacred historian. Like his father, Robertson published only one sermon: *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Nativity*. He preached the sermon on 6 January 1755 in Edinburgh as the annual sermon invited by the Society in

Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.³⁰ Typically, SSPCK sermons addressed issues related to the spread of the Gospel in Britain and throughout the world, and Robertson's was no exception. He analyzes the historical factors that converged to make the moment of Christ's birth the most effective and propitious moment in history for this transforming event to occur. This theme is not a new one in Presbyterian theology: the declaration in the *Confession of Faith* (8.2) that Christ was born in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) was a central idea as ministers traced the hand of providence in history. One such minister was Robert Fleming, who has been cited as a prime example of the "full extent of the connection in the Calvinist mind between history and prophecy."³¹ For example, Books 3 and 4 of his massive *Christology: A Discourse concerning Christ* examine in detail the issues surrounding his (and Robertson's) key contention: "That the *Time of Christ's coming* was the *Fulness of Time*, with respect unto the *concurring Circumstances* thereof, both as to *Men* and *Things*; which were such as never occur'd before, nor since, if all these be considered together."³² There is no direct evidence that Robertson consulted Fleming's discussion, but, as David Allan has demonstrated, the tradition of such providentialism was very strong among generations of Presbyterian clergy.³³

Robertson begins the sermon with the separation of sacred history from civil history: "sacred history, by drawing aside that veil which covers the counsels of the Almighty, lays open his designs to the view of his creatures" (6). Consequently, in this sermon, Robertson focuses not on doctrine alone but on doctrine "brought forth into action," which confirms "speculative opinions, by real and striking example" (6). But historicizing doctrine in this way leads Robertson to employ a new strategy for articulating the conjunction of faith and reason. He considers the general law that "the motion by which [God's] works advance towards their final and complete state is gradual and progressive" (9–10), and by this means he bridges the gap between the permanence of revelation and the change of history. All the productions of the natural realm and all the changes in the moral realm are "gradual and progressive" (10). By the same token,

³⁰ I cite the 6th edition (Edinburgh, 1791) reprinted in *Works*, vol. 11.

³¹ Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 52.

³² *Christology*, 2 vols. (London, 1705–08), 2:414.

³³ Provocative for this essay is Allan's claim that "the study of history could be seen as a devotional performance in its own right. It brought the audience into the closest possible contact with immediate prophetic evidence for the most valuable of spiritual truths" (53).

revelation itself “was not poured in upon mankind all at once, and with its full splendor.” Instead, “systems temporary and incomplete” will gradually but ultimately give way in the future to a “concluding and perfect revelation, which would *declare the whole council of God to man*” (10). This striking description of progressive revelation in history (with its radical historicizing of St. Paul in Acts 20:27) is crucial to Robertson’s thinking about history. It strengthens the case for modesty of judgment with the assurance that all questions will ultimately be answered and all mysteries explained. What we know at any moment is part of an historical process that will evolve over time toward a promised fulfillment.

It has been common to point to Adam Smith’s lectures on jurisprudence, which Robertson may have heard in an early form about 1750, as the (plagiarized) source of Robertson’s ideas of gradual historical change.³⁴ A recent critic has also argued that Robertson’s sermon shows the influence of the Newtonian thinking that Robertson found at the University of Edinburgh in the popular teaching of such figures as Colin Maclaurin.³⁵ In particular, Newton’s speculations on the progressive nature of history and the operation of general laws throughout the universe provided Robertson a means of bringing together Fleming’s interest in the relationship of history and prophecy and more recent, highly respected scientific knowledge. Maclaurin concludes his *Philosophical Account* with a vision of the gradual progress of human knowledge:

We know not how far it was proper or necessary that we should not be let into knowledge at once, but should advance gradually, that, by comparing new objects, or new discoveries, with what was known to us before, our improvements might be more complete and regular; or how far it may be necessary or advantageous, that intelligent beings should pass through a kind of infancy of knowledge.³⁶

One should not minimize the importance of figures like Smith and Newton would have for an intellectual like Robertson, but unlike Smith and Newton, Robertson was also a minister for whom the realm of faith was always an immediate presence. Thus, sources coming from within his daily thinking about religion would have a compelling authority and would be

³⁴ William Robert Scott, *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (1937, repr. New York, 1965), pp. 54–56, 63–64.

³⁵ Josh Ehrlich, “Providence and Newtonianism in the Works of William Robertson” (lecture, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, June 25, 2010).

³⁶ *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophical Discoveries*, 3d ed. (London, 1775), p. 412.

prior to ideas coming from these scientific or historical sources. One of the chief of these religious sources was a figure Robertson would certainly know and highly regard: William Wishart, the principal of the University of Edinburgh and formerly a minister at Founder's Hall and an admirer of Robert Fleming.³⁷ Although Robertson is not known to have viewed Wishart as a personal mentor, despite their similar backgrounds, we can nonetheless trace echoes of Wishart's characteristic thinking throughout Robertson's sermons. The echoes suggest that he may have shared John Erskine's estimate of Wishart, whom Erskine praised for "depth of knowledge, originality of genius, and the art of gaining attention to the most common and necessary subjects, by new reflections, illustrations and arrangements."³⁸ At the heart of Wishart's view of the Christian life is a conception of gradual improvement that parallels Newton's:

The *perfection* of any creature is the foundation of its *happiness*; and the *utmost* happiness any creature is capable of, is only to be obtained in the state of its *utmost* perfection: and as the true perfection of *such* creatures as *we* are, consists in rational and virtuous improvements, it is only so far as we advance in these that we can enjoy our true happiness; and in all nature, the most perfect state of any creature does not take place *all at once*, but arises from *small beginnings*, by a *gradual* and beautiful progress.³⁹

If the larger plan of providence, in Robertson's conception, unfolds by gradual development, so, for Wishart, does the moral life of the individual. Robertson repeats this moral theme throughout his sermons in statements (recorded by Dalrymple), such as

the life of holiness is progressive & if we do not gain, we must lose ground [4 March 1759, fol. 55]
 in the next life will be the fulfilling of those begun graces [i.e., graces begun on earth] [18 March 1759, fol. 57]
 Their works follow them. Their good dispositions are perfected in another state [15 August 1762, fol. 92]
 y^t religion was progressive: as in a journey, at every height a new prospect arises [and] the encouragement for us in this progressive state [dated only as 2 September, fol. 145]

For Robertson, then, sacred and civil history, and with them the personal moral world, were in progressive motion toward a final fulfillment.

³⁷ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta*, 4:154, 3:255.

³⁸ Erskine, *Agency of God*, in *Works*, 12:267, 270.

³⁹ *An Essay on the Indispensable Necessity of a Holy and Good Life to the Happiness of Heaven* (London, 1753), pp. 15–16.

Since at least 1744, alongside his ministry, Robertson had also been thinking about civil history, especially that of Scotland. The manuscript that would become the *History of Scotland during the Reign of Queen Mary and James VI* (1759) may have been another legacy from his father. According to Alexander Bower,

I have been assured on the authority of the late Rev. Mr. Macaulay of Queensferry, that Dr. Robertson's father had been engaged for a considerable number of years in investigating the same subject. Though he appears never to have arranged any materials for publication, yet this circumstance could not fail of exciting Dr. Robertson's curiosity to inquire more carefully than he had yet done, into that part of the History of Scotland which had occupied so much of the attention of a father for whose memory he entertained so sincere a regard.⁴⁰

However, no manuscript evidence survives to support such a claim, though an inventory of Robertson's papers done by the historian's eldest son in 1793 recorded "Twelve books of Notes, & Excerpts chiefly my Grandfathers."⁴¹ These could have contained the material Bower cites and presumably left to Robertson on his death in 1745. Alexander Carlyle claimed to have seen the manuscript in 1744 when Robertson showed him the beginning of the history, opening with the portrait of Cardinal Beaton, which eventually became the second chapter of the published version.⁴² It is even possible that father and son had a shared interest in the history's central figure, Mary, Queen of Scots, because stories of her circulated particularly in the Borthwick area and in the Gladsmuir/Haddington area where Robertson began his ministry.⁴³ However, it is unclear how much progress Robertson had actually made before he announced to Sir David Dalrymple in 1753 that he was beginning serious work on the project.⁴⁴

One thing is certain: the Jacobite invasion of 1745 galvanized Robertson's thinking about Scottish history. It forced him to confront the inability of the Hanoverian regime in Scotland to defend itself against the Highlanders, who would drag Scotland back into a feudal past completely at odds with the middle-ground religious attitudes Robertson had embraced and would soon articulate. But how was Scotland to be defended? Together

⁴⁰ *History of the University of Edinburgh*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1817–30), 3:76–77.

⁴¹ NLS MS 3980, fol. 129.

⁴² NLS MS 23920, fols. 81–85.

⁴³ See, for example, James Miller, *The Lamp of Lothian; or, the History of Haddington*, new ed. (Haddington, 1900) for some of this material.

⁴⁴ See above note 3.

with his like-minded colleagues, Robertson met the challenge in three ways: he took up arms, he pursued his ministry, and he wrote his history. As the Highlanders bore down on Edinburgh in September 1745, Robertson and his friends attempted to join in the proposed defense of the city, though the city was ultimately given up without a battle.⁴⁵ The impact of the Jacobite invasion was particularly powerful within the Church of Scotland. During September and October, for example, Robertson met regularly with the other members of the Presbytery of Haddington, spending “a considerable time in prayer, upon account of the disorderly state of this country, thro’ the present Rebellion.”⁴⁶ After the immediate danger had passed in April 1746, he together with the presbytery planned a Fast Day for 9 April in response to a call from the General Assembly to all presbyteries. At Haddington, the presbytery wished to address “the infalable [*sic*] tokens of God’s displeasure against us in that detestable rebellion” in the tradition of the Presbyterian jeremiad. The nation should engage in “solemn fasting, humiliation, & prayer” because the rebellion threatened the nation “with the loss of every thing dear to us as men or Christians, & which is avowedly supported by the united powers of Rome, France, & Spain the known & constant enemies of our Civil liberties & of our Holy protestant religion” (258). This was, indeed, a traumatic event that called for a response that would lay a proper foundation in church and state for Scotland’s future as a commercial society. Robertson undertook that task in his history.

After an introductory chapter summarizing Scottish history before the birth of Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1542, Robertson presents a narrative of events in church and state up to the Union of the Crowns in 1603. His focus is primarily on the complicated interactions between Mary and Elizabeth that led to Mary’s destruction and the form of national identity she represented. The history’s somewhat abrupt conclusion consists of a brief, generalized overview of the period between 1603 and the Union of 1707, passing over treatment of the Covenanters of the seventeenth century and ending with a paragraph asserting the emergence of a new commercial society in which Scotland is the beneficiary of English stability: “the union having incorporated the two nations, and rendered them one people, the distinctions which had subsisted for many ages gradually wear away.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Alexander Carlyle offers an account of their adventures in *Autobiography*, pp. 121–64.

⁴⁶ Haddington Presbytery Minutes, NAS, CH2/185/12, p. 251. The notes during 1745–1746 are in Robertson’s hand.

⁴⁷ *Works*, 2:313. I cite the 14th ed. (London, 1794), reprinted in vols. 1–2 of *Works*.

J.G.A. Pocock has argued that Robertson's narrative of statecraft is deficient because it fails to be interwoven with manners and that his narrative of religion is incomplete because it omits the history of the Covenanting clergy.⁴⁸ In other words, Robertson does not show how the Moderate cast of mind emerges from the struggles of the seventeenth century. Pocock goes on to comment that perhaps the story of the Covenanters was "too recent, too painful and too contentious in the debates between Moderate and Popular for Robertson, engaged all his life in an ecclesiastical politics of manoeuvre and manipulation, to think it prudent to attempt writing it" (274). This is an important point for the *History of Scotland* and for Robertson's later histories. If Robertson felt it necessary to avoid confronting sensitive issues of reason and faith directly through detailed narrative or polemic, then it may make sense for him to develop more indirect literary means to enact his Moderate values with persuasive power.

For instance, perhaps through implications of style, he could embed his values in the reader's experience of the text itself.⁴⁹ Consider the way he represents Mary as a symbol. Robertson and his readers often considered the history as primarily the story of Mary, and Robertson was generous toward her.⁵⁰ Yet if Scotland were to become a modern commercial society, the romantic attachment to Mary must be broken. Although it is an oversimplification to say that there is a single, coherent Marian position, there are common themes among the queen's defenders. Perhaps the most revealing is the argument from her unblemished character. The strongly pro-Marian historian Walter Goodall is typical:

For Mary Queen of Scots so far excelled all other sovereign Princes who ever yet appeared on the face of the earth, that, as if she had not been of

⁴⁸ Pocock, *Narratives of Civil Government*, pp. 272–74.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Sheehan also proposes that we should understand the relationship of religion and Enlightenment through analysis of textual practices rather than through description of philosophical propositions, and he sees this relationship as common to the Enlightenment period as a whole ("Enlightenment," 1075–79). "Religion and the Enlightenment," he argues, "were wedded together, not because of any intrinsic intellectual affinity between rationalism and mystery but because the media of the Enlightenment have fundamental structures through which new religious cultures and practices were created" (1076). In other words, the marriage of religion and the Enlightenment is not based on an explicit prenuptial contract but more a common law arrangement involving simple cohabitation. It is in this sense that Robertson expresses ideas that are more felt or lived than part of a explicit philosophical theory.

⁵⁰ See Stewart's discussion of the problem in his *Account*, in *Works*, 12:120–121. Robertson's synecdoche in writing to one of his correspondents is revealing: "I will give you the history of Queen Mary's reception in London" (Robertson to Margaret Hepburn, 20 February 1759, NLS MS 16711, fol. 234).

mortal nature, all the arts and contrivances of her numerous and malicious enemies have not availed to fix upon her one crime, shall I say, not one single foible, either while on the throne, or in the jail, from her cradle to her grave, unless the want of omniscience or omnipotence shall be reckoned in her a defect.⁵¹

For Goodall, Mary transcends human reason, a creature almost not of "mortal nature." She embodies and displays both the spirit of the Catholic religion and the power of feudal authority. Against this image, Robertson pits, not the historical evolution of Moderation, but the rhetoric that expresses the Moderate cast of mind. That rhetoric brings with it connotations we saw developed in his earlier writings in which balanced claims and modesty of judgment demonstrate the use of the reason God gave us to manage in a knowable but not fully revealed world. This quality is precisely what is lacking in Mary's character, and Robertson's task is to expose, but not denounce, that weakness because the historian writes as a member of a polite commercial society looking back on the stormy passions of an earlier time.

Mary's Catholicism, for example, is literally at the heart of her irrationality. "Popery," Robertson writes, "is a species of false religion, remarkable for the strong possession it takes of the heart" (1:360). It is not, in his view, the result of reason, but an irrational force that "no power in the understanding, and no passion in the heart" can withstand. It is no wonder, then, that Mary was totally in its grip: "Mary herself was deeply tinctured with all the prejudices of popery; a passionate attachment to the superstition is visible in every part of her character, and runs through all the scenes of her life." When Robertson comes to write his final summary portrait of Mary, he sees these same irrational forces at work in her character and subjects them to careful analysis:

Polite, affable, insinuating, sprightly, and capable of speaking and of writing with equal ease and dignity. Sudden, however, and violent in all her attachments; because her heart was warm and unsuspicious. Impatient of contradiction; because she had been accustomed from her infancy to be treated as a queen. No stranger, on some occasions, to dissimulation; which, in that perfidious court where she received her education, was reckoned among the necessary arts of government. Not insensible of flattery, or unconscious of that pleasure which almost every woman beholds the influence of her own beauty. Formed with the qualities which we love, not with the talents

⁵¹ *An Examination of the Letters Said to Be Written by Mary Queen of Scots*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1754), 1:xxvii.

that we admire; she was an agreeable woman, rather than an illustrious queen. [2:180]

Before our eyes, Mary is transformed from the radiant, unblemished apex of a feudal hierarchy to a member of a commercial society in her appropriately gendered role ("agreeable woman"). The reality of the modern world cannot support a woman bearing Mary's transcendent, romantic symbolism. He does not show how his Moderate cast of mind emerges from the narrative of religion, but his rhetoric nonetheless enacts that cast of mind, requiring the reader to view the narrative through a lens appropriate for a commercial society with a reasonable form of Christianity built on the fact that with the Renaissance and the Reformation humanity had "recover[ed] the capacity of exercising their reason" (1:146). But as he explained in a later sermon, this recovery implies a providential context because a monarch like Mary was "supposed to possess unlimited power, & subjects were bound to tame submission & passive obedience." People were denied "principles of liberty, the knowledge of the natural rights of man, & of the true end of civil government"—all privileges that we now possess and that must be ascribed "to the gracious favour of that God who is our God forever & ever."⁵² The Moderate vision of social economy is part of a providential history of fulfillment.

A year before the publication of the *History of Scotland* in 1759, Robertson had already begun casting about for a subject for his second book, and with the sudden success of his Scottish history the pressure on him for a new work intensified. After entertaining a number of alternatives and suggestions, ranging from a history of England to a collection of modern lives in the manner of Plutarch, Robertson settled on what he appears to have had in mind from the beginning: a history of the reign of Charles V.⁵³ None of his advisors particularly liked the choice, and one wonders why he chose the subject. It was not because of the attractive character of Charles. As Robertson noted in a letter to Horace Walpole,⁵⁴ Charles was "neither the most pleasant nor the most perfect character of the age." Instead, Robertson sought something bigger. It was Charles's reign that was important,

⁵² "Sermon on the Centenary of the Glorious Revolution, 1788," in *Works*, 12: 177, 185.

⁵³ John Blair to Robertson, 6 February 1759, NLS 3942, fols. 15–16; and David Hume to Robertson, 7 April 1759, in *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest G. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), pp. 48–49. Robertson first mentioned the topic of Charles V to Horace Walpole in his letter of 20 February 1759 in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis et al., 49 vols. (New Haven, 1952), 15:45–46. But it is clear that he had given the topic some thought already.

⁵⁴ See n. 53.

he explained, featuring the almost global scope of major events that ultimately shaped the modern status of Europe: "the struggle of the Spanish cortes for their liberty; the Reformation in Germany; the wars in Italy; the revival of letters; the conquest of the new world; the rise of the piratical states in Barbary, and the Emperor's expedition against them; his wars with the Turks; the rivalry between Charles and Francis [I of France]; their intrigues with Henry VIII, are all splendid objects in history." Indeed, each of Robertson's three major histories deals with the sixteenth century, making it important to bear in mind what this constellation of events meant to an historian with Robertson's particular set of interests. The sixteenth century brings together civil and religious history so as to lay the foundation of the modern state. On the one hand, it is the period in which we see the emergence of the balance of power among European states, a political concept governing relations and manners among all the states of Europe. On the other, the Reformation provided the protestant religion, which was a faith suitable for a modern state. In *Charles V*, Robertson presents a narrative in which the church and state reach an accommodation by moving beyond wars of religion to a new stability based on the connection of church and state in preserving the national interest.

The concept of a balance of power had a long history, reaching back to Thucydides' discussion of the relation of Athens and the Spartan league through Polybius to Guicciardini's analysis of the power relations of the Italian states. More recently, Hume had written an important essay on the balance of power in 1752.⁵⁵ For Robertson, the concept was at the heart of the story he wished to tell, for it was during the reign of Charles V "that the powers of Europe were formed into one great political system, in which each took a station, wherein it has since remained with less variation, than could have been expected after the shocks occasioned by so many internal revolutions, and so many foreign wars" (3:x-xi).⁵⁶ Moreover, "the ideas concerning the balance of power, then introduced or rendered general, still influence the councils of nations" (3:xi). The narrative turns on two key ideas: the first, developed in the "View of the Progress of Society," represented the progressive improvement of the states of Europe toward a common level of strength and refinement; the second offers a detailed examination of how Charles V's "enterprizing ambition" (6:305)

⁵⁵ "Of the Balance of Power," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), pp. 332-341. See also Frederick G. Whelan, "Robertson, Hume, and the Balance of Power," *Hume Studies* 21 (1995), 315-32 for a useful comparison.

⁵⁶ I cite the 7th edition (1792) reprinted in *Works*, vols. 3-6.

failed to produce an extensive empire but instead a set of states held in counterbalance with each other by their relative equality of power. Thus, Robertson sees instituted an era of realistic limitations placed on political power so as to maintain a sense of the common good of nations. In the same way that the romantic ideals surrounding Mary give way to the rationality of commercial society, so Charles' vast, destructive ambitions of military conquest ironically give way to a group of more provident states that are now internally strengthened and that can now give attention to their social improvement.

However, the balance of power is only one dimension of the story of Charles V. The other is the Reformation, and the connection of the two is crucial. Pocock has spoken of Robertson's habit of "contextualizing ecclesiastical history within civil."⁵⁷ The threat to the emerging balance of power in the beginning of the sixteenth century was the papacy with its claim that religious authority overrides civil.

In all ecclesiastical controversies, their decisions were received as the infallible oracles of truth. Nor was the plenitude of their power confined solely to what was spiritual; they dethroned monarchs; disposed of crowns; absolved subjects from the obedience due to their sovereigns; and laid kingdoms under interdicts. There was not a state in Europe which had not been disquieted by their ambition; there was not a throne which they had not shaken; nor a prince, who did not tremble at their power. [3:149]

Equally dangerous were extreme protestants, who, "having thrown off the authority of their ancient principles, do not yet fully comprehend the nature, or feel the obligation, of those new tenets which they have embraced" (5:71–72). Such unilateral action destroys the balance of power because it refuses to recognize the interests of others, as a modern commercial society must. But, as he noted in the *History of Scotland*, the Reformation brought with it not only "more enlarged notions in religion," but also "more liberal and generous sentiments concerning civil government" (1:190). The history that Robertson presents, therefore, tells the story of how the emergence of the balance of power means the incorporation of religion into the rational calculations of the state.

But the story does not end there. Robertson also reinscribes the story of civil society within the yet larger unfolding of providence so that steps toward reason and refinement may be understood as steps toward a fuller revelation of a divine plan. In his unpublished sermon on the Glorious

⁵⁷ Pocock, *Narratives of Civil Government*, p. 286.

Revolution, after describing the civil and religious liberties Britain enjoys, he goes on to show how the balance of power spread them to Europe:

All the civilized nations of Europe may be considered as forming one extensive community. The intercourse among them is great, & every improvement in science, in arts, in commerce, in government introduced into any of them is soon known in the others, & in time is adopted & imitated. [12:182]

These nations believed “That our Zion like that mentioned in the Psalm [48:12–13] was beautiful & our situation on the sides of the north, the joy of the whole earth, men saw it & they marveled” (12:183). Likewise, after introducing Charles V and his political situation in Book I, Robertson turns in Book II to display the hand of providence in the rise of the Reformation in language that echoes *The Situation of the World*:

The interposition of Heaven, in favour of the Christian religion at its first publication, was manifested by miracles and prophecies wrought and uttered in confirmation of it. Though none of the reformers possessed, or pretended to possess, these supernatural gifts, yet that wonderful preparation of circumstances which disposed the minds of men for receiving their doctrines, that singular combination of causes which secured their success, and enabled men, destitute of power to triumph over those who employed against them extraordinary efforts of both, may be considered as no slight proof, that the same hand which planted the Christian religion, protected the reformed faith, and reared it, from beginnings extremely feeble, to an amazing degree of vigour and maturity. [4:104–05]⁵⁸

He makes this commentary implicit in political events as well, though much less visibly. For example, when Charles’ ambitious plans are overturned with the Treaty of Passau in 1552, Robertson reminds us that “so wonderfully doth the wisdom of God superintend and regulate the caprice of human passions, and render them subservient towards the accomplishment of his own purposes” (6:93–94). Then he reinforces his point by describing the “miserable plight” of Charles’ troops as they make their way over the Alps after their final defeat at the hands of Maurice of Saxony and noting how it was “very unlike the pomp with which Charles had appeared during the five preceding years as the conqueror of Germany” (6:72–73). Turning back to the defeat of the Elector of Brandenburg in 1547, which launched Charles’ German conquest, one finds Charles “seated on a magnificent throne, with all the ensigns of his dignity, surrounded by a numerous train of the princes of the empire” (5:419). The contrast with the

⁵⁸ Cp. *Situation*, p. 7.

humiliated, defeated elector prompted in everyone's mind "serious reflections . . . upon the instability and emptiness of human grandeur" (5:420), exactly what has now beset Charles himself. Moments like this one force a shift in perspective for readers, pulling them out of civic history and into a providential history that deals with Charles as it did with Mary and validates the claim of the Moderate vision of social economy.

The major omission from *Charles V* was, of course, the conquest of the New World by the Spanish. As he explains in his preface to *Charles V*, Robertson found that to treat these events "as extensively as they merited, must produce an episode, disproportionate to the principal work" (3:xiv). It was not simply a matter of length, however. In writing his last two histories, the *History of America* and the *Disquisition* on India, Robertson moved outside the European sphere with its tradition of civil history and moved toward other areas of the globe whose human cultures did not share that history. This was a daring move. Although Robertson attempted to contain these new histories within the civil history of Europe by telling their story within the context of European colonization, he nonetheless had to embark upon a different narrative form, employing and assessing new theories based on conjectural history and natural science that he had previewed in the first volume of *Charles V*. But, in the case of the *History of America*, he was doubtless well aware of the scope of the task facing him because he had long harbored an interest in the process of conquest and colonization in the New World; and he seems to have envisioned a project much larger than just the history of the early Spanish conquests. As early as 1756, in a review of William Douglas' *Summary, Historical and Political, . . . of the British Settlements in North-America* (1755) for the *Edinburgh Review*, he noted that "the British empire in America has become a great and interesting object in history" (*Works*, 12:82), a sentiment he reiterated more broadly in 1771, claiming that "'America must in some future Period be the Seat of a Mighty Empire.'"⁵⁹ He saw New World colonization as encompassing both northern and southern hemispheres so that the sixteenth-century Spanish story he published in 1777 was meant to be read in the context of a fuller history of New World colonization. In addition to the Spanish narrative, he planned to include the British, the Portuguese, and "the settlements made by the several nations of Europe in the West India islands" (7:vi).⁶⁰ He proved unable to complete these additional

⁵⁹ Quoted in J. Bennett Nolan, *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland, 1759 and 1771* (Philadelphia, 1938), p. 176.

⁶⁰ I cite the 6th edition (London, 1792) reprinted in *Works*, vols. 7–9.

histories partly because of the disruptive effects of the American Revolution and partly because his health collapsed under strain of scholarly and administrative tasks.

At first glance, the narrative structure of the work appears unusual. Robertson focuses his attention in three areas: the exploration and conquests of Columbus, Cortes, and Pizarro, the description of native life and culture, and the nature and extent of the civilizations of the Aztecs and Incas. The first chapter is an introduction tracing the history of navigation from earliest times up to the time of Columbus. It functions as background summary in the same way as did the opening chapter of the *History of Scotland* and the more elaborate first volume of *Charles V*. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the voyages of Columbus, with chapters 5 and 6 to Cortes and Pizarro respectively. Chapter 4 breaks the narrative with a description and analysis of native Americans, and it is counterbalanced with chapter 8 describing the Aztecs and Incas as forms of civilization to be examined against those of Europe. The history concludes with a chapter on the effects of Spanish policies on the colonies from the sixteenth to the mid eighteenth century, drawing the American story back into a Eurocentric context. Thus, we have tales of chivalric boldness and romantic delusion among the conquistadores, the presentation of a stage of society (savagery) prior to the European experience of *Charles V*, the anomaly of Aztec and Inca empires that somehow lack civil histories, and contemporary analysis of problematic colonial policy. But what gives these heterogeneous materials their form and connection is what we have noticed in his two previous works: it is the working of the Moderate *mentalité* as Robertson's narrator dramatizes the challenges of thinking about such a disparate set of concerns in terms of faith and reason.⁶¹ The history of America poses the most difficult and obscure challenges Robertson had yet encountered.

Wherever Robertson turned in his history, he faced uncertain information, poorly explored territory, or striking facts that seem to overpower explanation. David Womersley claims that the *History of America* is permeated with a sense of disjunction, in which the particular displaces the general.⁶² Robertson still relies on his carefully balanced analyses of char-

⁶¹ I have explored the religious and historical sources of the history more fully in "Impartiality in Robertson's History of America," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1985), 56–77.

⁶² "The Historical Writings of William Robertson," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986), 503–06.

acters, events, and cultures; but now they lead to a sense of bafflement or openness before something seemingly inexplicable. A few examples must suffice. Consider the handling of the so-called degeneracy thesis of Cornelius de Pauw, who argued that climate is the primary, if not the only, cause of the degeneracy of the human species in the New World. For Robertson, however, this monocausal explanation cannot begin to account for the facts: "the operations of men are so complex, that we must not attribute the form which they assume to the force of a single principle or cause" (8:141–42). The cause is overdetermined, and explanation at this point must be deferred. Or we can turn to the treatment of Bartolomé de las Casas, the "Apostle of the Indians." For some, such as the Abbé Raynal, he was a saint, "interposing between the American and the Spaniard," in order to save the native people from destructive slavery.⁶³ But for Robertson, Las Casas was difficult to judge because his circumstances were unique. On the one hand, Robertson concludes that Las Casas deserves great praise for his "humane activity" (7:336) on behalf of the Indians; but, on the other, he negated his own efforts through rashness, imprudence, and an inability to understand his own situation in the colonial effort. As a result, all his greatness contracts to a mere point with his withdrawal to a monastery in St. Domingo, just as happened to Charles V upon his monastic retirement. Or finally consider the absence from America of the story of providential improvement that Robertson tells in *Charles V*.⁶⁴ Robertson never explains why the stadial development of society he maps out in the *Progress of Society* did not occur in the New World. He carefully evokes the image of humanity gradually peopling the earth from the time of Eden:

we know, with infallible certainty, that all the human race spring from the same source, and that the descendents of one man, under the protection, as well as in obedience to the command of heaven, multiplied and replenished the earth. . . . We cannot trace the branches of this first family, or point out with certainty the time and manner in which they divided and spread over the face of the globe. [8:26]

But the peoples of the New World—even, in the end, the apparently improved Aztecs and Incas—remain outside this narrative. The huge distance between the "infallible certainty" of the divine plan and the

⁶³ *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, trans. J.O. Justamond, 6 vols. (1798; repr. New York, 1969), 3:197.

⁶⁴ Pocock, *Barbarians, Savages and Empires*, p. 200.

uncertainty of human reason in discerning that plan takes us to the ultimately mysterious conjunction of religion and history. Human beings will lessen that distance with rational investigation, such as the Russian voyages of discovery of 1741 that confirmed a land passage from the Old World to the New (8:43–47). But as David Dalrymple recorded in his notes of the sermon Robertson delivered on 30 December 1759, Robertson “observed that y^e scriptures contained the history of providence, which in other historys [*sic*] is less Clear, in Common life less discernable, because in profane history & in common life we read in interpretation” (NLS 25,411, fol. 62). Religion and history, the sacred and profane, will move closer together as knowledge expands. We know that history unfolds within a providential plan, but we do not have specific knowledge of that plan. Instead, as creatures living in profane history, we can only “interpret” the future because we cannot

penetrate into the mysteries of the divine administration. To discern and to worship a superintending power, is an evidence of the enlargement and maturity of the human understanding; a vain desire of prying into futurity, is the error of its infancy, and a proof of its weakness. [8:198]

Yet the facts of colonial expansion and conquest remain. The earth will be peopled by these means, and humanity can only proceed in this uncharted realm with reason and modesty and the assurance that behind the apparent uncertainty there is “infallible certainty” nonetheless. These issues weighed heavily with Robertson, and he was to bring some of them to a kind of closure in the vision of his final history.

The only remaining portion of his large history of colonization consists of two books of the proposed section on British colonies, which were published separately after Robertson’s death by his eldest son in 1796. His work on the project had been derailed by a massive breakdown in his health. As Robertson observed in 1784, “I labored beyond my strength, [during] the time of publishing the History of America. This brought upon me a violent Rheumatick fever, which shattered my constitution so much that it cost me three years attention, & three journeys to Buxton [a health resort in northern England], to re-establish my health.”⁶⁵ However, Robertson’s health returned slowly, and by 1785 he was ready to think again about writing. Although the colonial history was lost, two more impor-

⁶⁵ Robertson to Robert Murray Keith, 8 March 1784, BL Add. MS 35350, fols. 70–71.

tant historical tasks remained for him: the revision of his three histories into definitive edition and the writing of the unusually speculative *Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge the Ancients Had of India* (1791). The revision project was finished by 1788,⁶⁶ and, having gained some literary momentum, Robertson turned again to historical writing. It is not clear what exactly sparked Robertson's interest in India. Robertson credits his reading of James Rennell's *Memoir of the Map of Hindoostan*, the second edition of which appeared in 1788, just as he was finishing his historical revisions.⁶⁷ But Robertson does not mention other possible stimuli, such as the fact that his two younger sons, James and David, had embarked on military careers in India during the 1780's and into the 1790's; or the Abbé Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, a book that he admired⁶⁸ and that opens with a review of commerce between India and the West and then turns to a description of Indian manners and customs; or the trial of Warren Hastings, which was widely publicized, featured his friend Edmund Burke as prosecutor, and provided a likely audience for a new book on India.⁶⁹ The book itself is uncharacteristically organized. Robertson's main narrative treats the commercial relationships of India and the countries to the west, including the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as well as Europe, from the earliest times up to the landing of the Portuguese in India in 1498. The narrative is followed by an appendix, comprising 25% of the whole work and examining the manners, customs, institutions, and learning of the Hindus. The appendix is not restricted in time because Robertson assumes Hindu culture is timeless and thus he ranges freely from the ancient to the modern world. The remaining 25% of the book consists of notes and illustrations to the narrative and the appendix. As a whole, the book lacks the grand narrative architecture of the previous histories, and the title of *disquisition* rather than *history*

⁶⁶ The revision project is discussed more fully in my "Robertson's Letters and the Life of Writing," in *William Robertson*, pp. 48–50.

⁶⁷ Rennell to Robertson, 2 July 1791, NLS MS 3944, fols. 68–71.

⁶⁸ Robertson to Jean-Baptiste Suard, 21 February 1773, in *New Monthly Magazine* 13, pt. 1 (1 January to June 1820), 9.

⁶⁹ The Hastings trial began on 15 February 1788, a few months before Robertson started regularly consulting books on India and the East in July 1788, according to the Edinburgh University Library register (EUL MS Da.2.6).

indicates its exploratory character.⁷⁰ He wishes to open the relationship of India to the West suggestively rather than construct a finished analysis.

Although often ignored or treated cursorily, the *Disquisition* deserves careful attention because it implies a vision of world history that culminates Robertson's historical thinking with respect to religion. The narrative lays out an unbroken record of commercial contact with India. He notes in his preface that his purpose is to exhibit "such a view of the various modes in which intercourse with India had been carried on from the earliest times, as might shew how much that great branch of commerce has contributed, in every age, to increase the wealth and power of the nations which possessed it" (10:iii–iv).⁷¹ As he moves through the course of the narrative, Robertson in effect layers one mode of contact between east and west on top of another, like geological strata, establishing India not only as a desirable but also as an inevitable trading partner for any commercial nation. The narrative documents the persistent desire in the West for contact with India, resulting in deepening involvement despite manifest obstacles and fluctuations. In the ancient world, first contact was only possible by land, though the Phoenicians eventually established sea routes and Alexander not only made India known to the west but he also established the first foreign presence there. With his death and the ultimate collapse of his empire, however, no European power had the means to hold territory in India again until the arrival of the Portuguese. But commercial contact continued nonetheless. Egypt quickly obtained control of all commerce with India and from this monopoly "derived that extraordinary degree of opulence and power for which it was conspicuous" (10:48–49). The subsequent conquest of Egypt by Rome brought a new stage: commerce with India increased to a degree "astonishing even to the present age" (10:55), driven by the powerful Roman demand for luxuries. With Islamic control of the eastern Mediterranean in the seventh century, Europe was again cut off from direct contract with India, though trade, mediated through Islamic merchants, continued. The crusades brought Europe into closer touch with Islamic merchants, and eventually first Genoa and then Venice gained control of the Indian trade. As the "spirit of commerce" revived in the thirteenth century (10:154), European competitors entered the field, and with the discovery of direct routes

⁷⁰ Stewart J. Brown believes the book may have been a part of a larger project that Robertson ceased work on because of health ("William Robertson, Early Orientalism, and the *Historical Disquisition on India* of 1791," *Scottish Historical Review* 88 [2009], 291).

⁷¹ I cite the 2nd edition (London, 1794) reprinted in *Works*, vol. 10.

to India, a radical change in modes of commerce ensued, bringing in its wake fierce competition for this "lucrative branch of commerce" (10:174) and the consequent need for territorial control. With this dramatic shift in the mode of commerce, Robertson concludes his survey, but the historical pattern has been firmly constructed: gradually but inexorably East and West are moving closer together.

At the beginning of his appendix on Indian culture Robertson asks the obvious question behind his narrative of gradually increasing contact: what was it that caused nations throughout history to engage so extensively and persistently in trade with India? "Not only the people contiguous to India, but remote nations, seem to have been acquainted, from time immemorial, with its commodities, and to have valued them so highly, that in order to procure them they undertook fatiguing, expensive, and dangerous journeys" (10:228). Driving this demand for Indian trade was not raw natural products (pepper excepted) but the "superior improvement of [India's] inhabitants," and he therefore wishes to survey in the appendix Indian "institutions, manners, and arts" in order to explain "the eagerness of all nations to obtain the productions of their ingenious industry" (10:229). There is more, in Robertson's view, drawing Europe and India into contact than simply trade, crucial as that is: the intercourse of the two is ultimately driven by a form of cultural difference. The western nations found in India a superior polish and sophistication—in short, a wisdom—that was irresistibly attractive because a desire for progress has been implanted in all human societies. Humanity is embarked on a "career of improvement," a process, he points out at the beginning of the book, that has its origins in the East where humanity was originally allotted a place, with India "one of the first countries in which men made any considerable progress in that career" (10:2–3). Like the empires of the Aztecs and the Incas, India is an anomaly: it is apparently one of the first civilized nations, yet it has not progressed in the way European nations have.

Such cultural difference poses a challenge: how should a Christian commercial society interpret such an anomaly? Robertson turns, accordingly, to an analysis of culture. The appendix covers six topics: social structure, political constitution, laws, arts, science, and religion. With respect to all these topics Robertson insists on the high state of early Indian culture, his enthusiasm sometimes leading him to views running counter to received historical and popular opinion. For example, his discussion of social structure, concentrating primarily on caste, overturns what was usually seen as a negative quality in Indian culture. The abbé Raynal is typical in arguing that

The distribution of the Indians into casts, each superior to the other, is a mark of the deepest corruption, and the most ancient system of slavery. It discovers an unjust and disgusting pre-eminence of the priesthood over all the other ranks of society, and a stupid inattention to the first legislator, to the general good of the nation.⁷²

For Robertson, however, the caste system is a sign of an early division of labor, “one of the most undoubted proofs of a society considerably advanced in its progress” (10:230). He concedes that the caste system stifles individual genius; but, he continues, “the arrangements of civil government are made, not for what is extraordinary, but for what is common,” and the caste system was the best means for providing for the needs of all the members of society (10:233–34). Moreover, the caste system brings the important benefit of expertise: Indian workers can concentrate their efforts on their allotted tasks, resulting in the highly sophisticated workmanship demonstrated in Indian goods.

Robertson moves in unorthodox directions in other areas. Consider one small aspect of the challenge posed by Hinduism: its conflict with Mosaic chronology. Enlightenment critics of religion like Voltaire had accepted the claims of Hindu chronology as showing the existence of a civilization both older and more refined than that of the Hebrews. The mainstream British public, however, though “willing to accept a sympathetic portrayal of Hinduism, . . . were not prepared to accept claims for its antiquity which could be subversive to Christianity.”⁷³ Robertson had a marked interest in questions of biblical chronology,⁷⁴ and it is no surprise that he takes this occasion to review the details of the chronology issue in Note LXVII, first quoting a lengthy description of the four Hindu eras from Nathaniel Halhed and then observing that “nothing can be more extravagant in itself,

⁷² Raynal, *Philosophical and Political History*, 1:44.

⁷³ P.J. Marshall, “Introduction,” in *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Marshall (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 26, 34.

⁷⁴ Robertson’s willingness to take seriously the questions posed by Hindu chronology is part of his wider interest in similar challenges to Mosaic chronology raised by geology. In 1785, he drafted a preface for James Hutton’s paper “Theory of the Earth,” which Hutton had read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh (see “Two Items Intended for Publication” by James Hutton, 1785 and 1788, in *Works*, 12:161–71). Robertson’s son-in-law was Patrick Brydone, author of *Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 2 vols. (London, 1773), which also raised some notorious questions deriving from geology. The long quotation from Nathaniel Halhed’s *Code of Gentoo Laws* (London, 1781) in Note LXVII of the *Disquisition* is in fact prefaced by Halhed in the *Code* with an allusion to a passage in the *Tour* that had troubled traditional Christian thinking (p. xxxvi). See Paul Fussell, Jr., “Patrick Brydone: The Eighteenth-Century Traveller as Representative Man,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 66 (1962), 355–56.

or more repugnant to our mode of calculating the duration of the world, founded on sacred and infallible authority," than the Hindu chronology (10:435). That claim of truth asserted, Robertson then assumes a delicately balanced stance:

To me it appears highly probable, that when we understand more thoroughly the principles upon which the factitious aeras or Jouges of the Hindoos have been formed, that we may be more able to reconcile their chronology to the true mode of computing time, founded on the authority of the Old testament. [10:437]

He personalizes his claim ("to me it appears"), situating it in the perspective of a limited perceiver; and he acknowledges that we do not have adequate information about Hindu chronology to make an informed judgment. But rather than reject Hindu chronology outright, he says that it is "highly probable" that the Hindu and Christian chronologies will be reconciled, thus bestowing a measure of truth on both systems and pushing (but not surpassing) the sympathetic limits of the British reading public. Deferring final judgment until better knowledge is available—a strategy we have seen Robertson employ consistently throughout his career—here allows him to articulate his goal of making the culture of the Hindu people "more respectable, and their condition more happy" (10:334). Moreover, not only has he acknowledged the achievements of Hindu culture, but, as he wrote to newly appointed Home Secretary Henry Dundas, he has also tried to move British imperial policy in a more humane, tolerant direction.⁷⁵

Such examples of Robertson's reaching toward "new territory"⁷⁶ begin to suggest the central unity of the *Disquisition*. The commercial relations with India are the basis of the commercial stage of social development as it reaches out to connect with parts of the world beyond the European context. Robertson sees in Britain's contact with India perhaps a new conduct of expansion that contrasts with the Spanish empire described in the *History of America*. Under British guidance there can develop a system or network in which nations and peoples are tied together by their mutual needs and tolerant commercial cultures. The power of Europe's "commercial genius" in other quarters of the globe was gained by discerning other peoples' "wants and resources, and by rendering them reciprocally subservient to one another" (10:213). This is not bloody conquest and violent appropriation but commercial interaction that "has established an union"

⁷⁵ Robertson to Henry Dundas, 6 July 1791, NAS GD 51/9/26.

⁷⁶ Phillipson, "Providence and Progress," in Brown, p. 71.

among nations (10:213), whose effect is “familiarizing and reconciling men of hostile principles and discordant manners to one another” (10:131). Robertson has thus returned to the vision of his 1755 sermon on *The Situation of the World*, the sixth edition of which was published in Edinburgh alongside the *Disquisition* in 1791.⁷⁷ In the earliest stages of the ancient world, Robertson wrote in the sermon,

the intercourse between nations was extremely inconsiderable. Voyages into remote countries, in quest of either wealth or knowledge, were very rare. Men moved in a narrow circle, little acquainted with any thing beyond the limits of their own small territory, and utter strangers to the condition and character of distant nations. [11:15]

At the end of his careers as minister and as historian, Robertson offers a vision of divinely-sanctioned world order being realized in history: “The world may now be considered as one vast society, closely cemented by mutual wants, each part contributing its share towards the subsistence, the pleasure, and improvement of the whole” (11:14–15).⁷⁸ Lying behind this seemingly secular description of social progress is the implied religious promise of an unfolding divine plan, one that Robertson repeatedly declared in his sermons, asking that we give “acknowledgement of his [God’s] hand in every thing that happens. [W]hile the thoughtless observer

⁷⁷ Robertson himself may have been thinking about a new edition of the sermon to accompany his history because he wrote to Andrew Strahan, probably in January or February 1789, asking, “Are there any copies remaining of my poor solitary sermon? I have been an unnatural parent. It is still naked as it was born; & I am afraid I shall never give it a companion” (Reed Collection, Dunedin Public Library ([NZ]).

⁷⁸ Robertson voiced an even more radical view of this culmination in his sermon on the Glorious Revolution in 1788. The passage is an excellent illustration of his eschatological thinking at the close of his career as it pertains to the Christian world. Speculating on the effects of the events of 1688, he concludes:

What may be the effects of this wonderfull [*sic*] revolution in the sentiments of nations is known to God alone. Our understanding is unable to fathom the councils of God, & it would be presumptuous in men whose faculties move within so limited a sphere to form any conjecture with respect to the means which Divine wisdom will employ to accomplish its own purposes. But if the spirit of mutual forbearance & toleration were to spread universally in the Christian world, it seems to afford a more certain prospect of the near approach of that happy time, where there shall be but one faith one baptism, & one hope of our calling, when “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Psalms 22:37). [12:184–85]

It is tantalizing to speculate on the exact shape of that “one faith one baptism, & one hope of our calling.” It is even more tantalizing to speculate on how this union of Christianity would engage with other world religions such as Hinduism. But Robertson’s view of progressive revelation leaves a small bit of room for just such speculations.

of events imputes our success to fortune & the haughty soldier to his own prowess, let our language be, it is the finger of y^e Lord.”⁷⁹ The immediate challenge for Britain is to maintain “a due regard for [Indians’] natural rights as men” (10:333) so India may participate in the improvement of the whole. Robertson has moved from the emergence of the commercial age in Scotland, through the broader developments of the European state system and the challenges of conquest and colonization, to the possibility of polite commerce uniting the world, a vision whose wider context is the movement of a benevolent providence.

⁷⁹ Dalrymple’s notes on Robertson’s sermon dated 29 November 1759, NLS MS 25.411, fol. 61.

4. MONTESQUIEU AND PLUTARCH: REFLECTIONS ON HISTORICAL ANALYSIS IN BROADER SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC COMPARISON

Rebecca Kingston

Plutarque [me] charme toujours . . .¹

What is the rhetorical nature, the relative critical force and the place of historical analysis in the broader field of social and political commentary? In the literature on methods in political science, there are scholars who suggest that for analytical purposes there is no difference and that historical examples merely allow one to expand the set of possible case studies.² Others suggest that given the rootedness of many of our current social and political institutions, some degree of historical perspective is required to get at the analytical core of these institutions.³ In this latter perspective, historical insight is regarded as essential because it can capture certain insights that are lost or not apparently available through a contemporary synchronic comparison with other practices or institutions.

While it is clear that the uses and possible abuses of history are numerous, the question I target in this chapter is that of how to characterize the *specificity* of historical analysis as opposed to more general social comparison.⁴ Other than the obvious factor that history is concerned with an analysis of the past, what is it about an analysis of the past that makes it possibly different in broad phenomenological terms, from general social comparison? What is its uniqueness or potential uniqueness as a form of analysis, a uniqueness that appears to make us perceive it to be particularly susceptible to abuse and suspicion (especially if embarked upon

¹ Montesquieu, *Pensées et Spicilège*, ed. Louis Desgraves (Paris, 1991), n. 607, p. 324.

² For a discussion of this approach and the potential challenge it can bring in terms of which historical account to accept, see Jonathan Isacoff, "Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict: historical bias and the use of history in Political Science," *Perspectives in Politics* 3 (2005), 71–88 and Ian Lustick, "History, Historiography and Political Science: multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias," *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996), 606–618.

³ Charles Tilly, "Why and How History Matters," In *Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (Oxford and New York, 2009). A recent example of this can be found in Niall Ferguson's *Civilization* (London, 2011).

⁴ I allude in passing here to Margaret Macmillan's *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London, 2009).

by public officials), but also an arguably indispensable feature of social analysis if done in an appropriate manner?

One possible place to begin to explore this question is in post-revolutionary France, where the exercise of historical analysis by eighteenth century thinkers became a political issue, a testimony to the potential power of historical scholarship. In his now famous 1819 speech at the *Athénée Royale*, Benjamin Constant gave what became a dominant commentary on the practice of history in the Enlightenment period, at least within the tradition of political theory.⁵ The purpose of this speech was to suggest that historical commentators of the preceding century got it all, or mostly all, wrong, at least with regard to their analysis of the ancient world.⁶ By calling attention to the sociological features which greatly distinguished the modern world from that of the ancients, and of the particularly novel nature of the institutions and practices of modern representative government, Constant sought to free his contemporaries from the unquestioned embrace of ancient models of government as authoritative in the development of normative models of free political life. In this work Constant singles out two French Enlightenment thinkers in particular, Mably and Rousseau, for their misguided understanding of the nature of political freedom as inspired by a study of the ancients. Montesquieu is given a slightly softer rebuke. Constant suggests that while Montesquieu did acknowledge differences between ancient republics and modern monarchies, he mistakenly considered regime type to be the key factor in determining the relative strength of commerce in monarchies, when he should have recognized more fundamental historical shifts.⁷

While Constant's purpose is not to suggest that the study of the ancient world is irrelevant for contemporary political understanding, like many theorists of the Renaissance, his call for greater historical sensitivity to the *specificity* of past cultural practice accompanies a demand that contemporary political practice be truer to its own time period and freed from the shackles of inappropriate and out-dated models of good politics. For

⁵ Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings*, ed. B. Fontana (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 309–28.

⁶ Of course the rhetorical thrust of this argument does belie an underlying logic that there is in fact some relevance of ancient ideals in the modern context, just not in the way suggested by his predecessors in the history of ideas.

⁷ “The Greek politicians who lived under the popular government did not recognize, he argues, any other power but virtue. Politicians of today talk only of manufactures, of commerce, of finances, of wealth and even of luxury. He attributes this difference to the republic and the monarchy. It ought instead to be attributed to the opposed spirit of ancient and modern times.” *Political Writings*, p. 319.

Constant, especially in this famous piece, better politics demands better history defined by a more accurate representation of the uniqueness of past circumstances, at least where politics is concerned, precisely so that politics can be freed from those expectations and models of the past.

But should we accept Constant's assessment, both in terms of his indictment of Enlightenment presumptions as well as in his more general claim about the relevance of history for politics, and especially his claim that expert attention to historical detail should relieve us of the need to derive normative models of politics and society from the past? Of course, Constant's invocation of Mably and Rousseau serves as a foil to reject a whole generation of revolutionary practice driven by what in hindsight were regarded as inappropriate and excessively austere models of republican virtue. If we grant Constant's claim that the normative accounts motivating revolutionary practice were to a great degree inspired by the reflections of these thinkers ("c'est la faute à Rousseau"), what is less certain is whether we can ascribe to Enlightenment historiography in general, or to Mably, Rousseau and Montesquieu, in particular, (that is, we must remember, three Enlightenment social theorists who did not conceive of themselves primarily as historians), inadequate or misguided senses of history, again where politics is concerned. Indeed, how can one really determine or assess what is an adequate or inadequate understanding of the specificity of one's own era in relation to another era being studied? Given that history may in part be studied for the more general lessons or patterns that it can provide, that may shed light on the human condition as a whole to some degree, and also given that it is a common condition of humanity that allows us to some degree to even bridge the gap of understanding brought about by historical gaps in time, how can we ascertain the appropriate or suitable sense of both historical continuity and distinction necessary for good historical scholarship and good political practice? Can one indeed assert a perennially appropriate balance of historical continuity and discontinuity, or does it and should it be modified depending on the specific scholarly task at hand or on the period being studied?

As one route to addressing this set of questions I explore how one thinker mentioned by Constant in his famous speech actually regarded the relevance of history to the task of social and political analysis. While from the point of view of historians we might say with Constant that Montesquieu lacked adequate attention to the specific details of context or the archival and first account sources necessary to build a fully valid picture of ancient republicanism in its uniqueness, should we also reject it from the point of view of social and political analysis? In other words, what in

particular does the recourse to historical example add to Montesquieu's work that might not otherwise have been provided by other modes or examples of social comparison? How might Montesquieu have understood or defined history as unique and distinct from other types of social scientific study (such as what has since become known as comparative sociology and political science)? What in turn was the political function of this sensibility, if any?

Given that Montesquieu did not engage in the work of history through his own compilation of evidence in archives or artifacts, but did so through the adjudication of a number of printed primary and secondary sources, for the purpose of this study I have chosen to explore Montesquieu's attitudes and sense of history through his use of one source, namely the historical writing of Plutarch, and in particular Plutarch's account of the *Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans*, a source which clearly shines forth in Montesquieu's invocation of ancient republicanism in *L'Esprit des lois*.⁸ This study seeks to shed light on whether or how Montesquieu perceived historical difference and continuity in any way distinct from other forms of cultural and political difference.

We will see that Montesquieu did indeed have a sense of history, and, contra Constant, the distinctness of his historical understanding was not reducible to categories of regime and culture. Whereas Constant's sense of the specificity of historical eras led to a certain freeing of horizons in the political present, Montesquieu regarded historical specificity as a possible source of critical perspective still relevant in the contemporary era. In fact, it is precisely Montesquieu's judicious invocation of the critical possibilities in an acknowledgement of the contextual specificity of the past that both distinguishes and privileges historical reflection in his work of political theorizing over mere ethnographic and comparative political analysis. To restate this point, Montesquieu demonstrates to us that while the focus on different cultures and practices elsewhere can generate reflective awareness of the specific nature of one's own culture and practices, a focus on the historical precedents of one's own culture carries stronger potential for a more critical perspective given that the past represents not just a theoretical alternative way of being, but one with the possibility of being a real alternative. It is this structure of invoking the past in comparative analysis that allows Montesquieu to provide a forceful critique of the principle of honour in his own monarchical times in a

⁸ Plutarch, *Lives*. ed. Arthur Clough (New York, 1992).

way unparalleled by his other ethnographic analysis, as found for example in his earlier *Lettres persanes*. It is a device that helps to distinguish mere satire from deep critique. In the long run, Montesquieu's appeal to classical republicanism, in part through the use of Plutarch's work, outshone Diderot's more ethnographic approach and helped to sustain a long tradition of philosophical expression of social discontent, and this in spite of Montesquieu's express political project.⁹

I. *An Overview of Montesquieu's use of Plutarch*

D'Alembert, in his "Eloge de Montesquieu", suggests that Plutarch, along with Tacitus, was one of the historians from whom Montesquieu took the greatest inspiration.¹⁰ The suggestion is surprising. First, works of Plutarch were clearly standard texts in the educational curriculum of the time, so it appears somewhat odd to single out this influence when most educated citizens considered his work as a common cultural reference. Why not mention Virgil, Sallust and Livy as well? Second, as one recent scholar has noted, there are over thirty-nine overt references to Plutarch in *L'Esprit des lois* and while this number is not insignificant, an unscientific survey would suggest that citations of Plato, Justinian and the abbé Dubos do surpass those of Plutarch.¹¹ So in what sense was Plutarch important for Montesquieu, and what is the significance of this? Why does d'Alembert single Plutarch out as an author of particular significance for Montesquieu?

According to Howard, Montesquieu's overt references to Plutarch generally related to quite specific or trivial matters of historical accuracy, but she goes on to suggest that his debt to Plutarch was indeed much greater, to the point of assimilating and reproducing many of his broader arguments, including his tripartite theory of regimes, his account of ancient republics, his theory of climate and his comparisons of the actions of great historical figures, which Montesquieu then presented as his own.¹² There

⁹ For a discussion of this philosophical tradition see Bernard Yack's *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992).

¹⁰ D'Alembert, "Eloge de Montesquieu," *L'Encyclopédie*, vol. 5.

¹¹ Martha Walling Howard, *The Influence of Plutarch in the Major European Literatures of the 18th century* (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 50.

¹² "He acknowledges his use of Plutarch at least thirty-nine times as a reference, along with Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Tacitus, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and others; however, his avowal is likely to take the form of attributing to Plutarch verification of some trivial detail in an account, with no mention that the entire account in fact came from Plutarch, or indeed, from anyone save Montesquieu." *Ibid.*, p. 50.

is, in fact, little evidence of this and so in exploring Montesquieu's use of Plutarch, we also will explore how Plutarch's work was integrated and modified by Montesquieu. A sorting out of the continuities and contrasts between the work of Plutarch and that of Montesquieu will shed light on the broader issues of Montesquieu's relationship to the historical past.

A first step is to determine what texts of Plutarch Montesquieu had access to and in what editions and format. Montesquieu was well known to have a fairly broad knowledge of major writers of the ancient world, although as far as we know he did not know ancient Greek well and so had to read the Greeks in translation. The most obvious source for authors of the French Enlightenment is Jacques Amyot's sixteenth century translations of the *Lives* and the *Moralia*. These works continue to be the standard French editions of Plutarch. These were also editions that were found in Montesquieu's own library.¹³

In Montesquieu's reading notes, we also see reference to particular writings of Plutarch that he either intended to read, or on which he was providing an immediate commentary. We know, for example, that Montesquieu acknowledged the importance of reading the lives of Theseus and Solon in order to inform himself better on Athenian republics and to fine-tune "mon système sur la liberté".¹⁴ He notes the need to pay attention to Plutarch's account of Lycurgus in helping to explain how the nobility could so easily receive the harsh laws that Lycurgus imposed on the Spartans.¹⁵ He provides brief reading notes on Plutarch's lives of Agis and Cleomenes working out some of the details of the evolution of property laws in Sparta.¹⁶ Montesquieu also makes reference to and provides commentary on Plutarch's moral essays and in particular on Plutarch's *Treatise on Anger* and his reflections on the Sibylline verses.¹⁷

¹³ Louis Desgraves and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, eds., *Catalogue de la Bibliothèque de Montesquieu à la Brède* (Napoli, Paris and Oxford, 1999). According to this catalogue Montesquieu owned a 1575 edition of Plutarch's works, a 1559 edition of Plutarch's *Lives*, a 1583 edition of the *Lives* and a 2 volume edition of the *Mixed Works* published in 1603 and 1607, all translated into the French by Amyot. The first two were printed in Paris by Michel de Vascosan and the third by Jérémie des Planches. The printer for the two seventeenth century volumes of Amyot's translation is not noted in the catalogue. Montesquieu's only other owned editions of Plutarch were mid-sixteenth century editions in Latin all published in Basel with no printer identified.

¹⁴ Montesquieu, *Pensées et Spicilège*, Pensée n. 907, ed. Louis Desgraves (Paris, 1991), p. 368.

¹⁵ Montesquieu, *Pensée* n. 1773, p. 553.

¹⁶ Montesquieu, *Pensée* n. 1837, p. 569.

¹⁷ Montesquieu, *Spicilège* n. 367, p. 767, and *Spicilège* n. 541, p. 822.

While few and eclectic, these disparate remarks do reveal important clues about Montesquieu's reading of Plutarch. First, we can see that he read Plutarch's work selectively rather than in its entirety but from both the *Lives* and the *Moralia*. Second, his interest in Plutarch's *Lives* was largely as a chronicler of political developments in the ancient world; in other words, he took Plutarch seriously as a source for relatively good historical insight into either the actions of famous men or the particular nature of the regimes they helped to manage. Clearly Montesquieu was not as concerned with the more general lessons of moral character that Plutarch's focus on individual political actors has been said to be most central to the work, or as a writer commentating on and developing Platonic theory.¹⁸ Still, the fact that Plutarch is now being treated more seriously as a historian in his own right by classicists, at least selectively, does vindicate Montesquieu's use of Plutarch's texts in this way.¹⁹ We also see by these remarks that Montesquieu appears to rely on Plutarch more to complete his understanding of politics in ancient Greece rather than ancient Rome.

In addition to Montesquieu's specific citations of and references to Plutarch one can discern a similarity in a number of broad themes that inform the works of both these authors. While Plutarch's *Lives* can be judged to be overtly about character and therefore about the ways in which individual behavior can drive public life, there are times in the work when Plutarch appears more skeptical about the driving force of individual action and where the force of institutions trumps the role of character in historical explanation. Similarly, Montesquieu, not only in his *Considérations*, but indeed throughout *L'Esprit des lois*, provides reflection on the relative weight of institutional circumstances, religion, commerce and so on in shaping political outcomes. A second broad theme that is common to the two writers is the comparative framework that puts Athens and Rome at relative parity as examples of republican regimes. Here ancient Greek history is celebrated for its political practice and men of action rather than its intellectual and philosophical traditions. According to Lamberton, such a comparison would have been shocking to a fifth

¹⁸ See, for example, Timothy Duff, *Plutarch's Lives. Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford, 1999).

¹⁹ Perhaps the most prominent contemporary defender of Plutarch as a reputable scholar of history is Christopher Pelling. See for example his *Plutarch and History* (London, 2002). See also "Introduction," *Essays on Plutarch's Lives*. Edited by B. Scardigli (Oxford, 1995).

century citizen, given the overwhelming power of Rome and the relatively feeble imperial presence of Athens in its prime.²⁰ For those living in the Hellenistic period, there was not much in political terms about Athens that could lend itself to a meaningful comparison with Rome. By suggesting that their founders were comparable in certain respects, Plutarch set the groundwork through which broader regime comparisons between Greece and Rome became possible.

II. *Montesquieu, Plutarch and the Lives of Theseus, Lycurgus and Solon*

From a professional historian's perspective, Plutarch's accounts of the lives of Theseus, Lycurgus and Solon in the founding and development of Athens and Sparta pose numerous challenges. Much of the information associated with their stories remains within the realm of myth rather than history, insofar as the extant accounts are full of supernatural occurrences, numerous contradictions and no independent data or documents to back them up. Even Plutarch himself acknowledges the shaky historical ground he embarks on in his opening remarks on Theseus suggesting that he is closer to the realm of 'prodigies and fictions' rather than that of history.²¹ Still, even here Plutarch does not abandon fully his claims to a more reasonable account as he suggests that he will submit fable "to the purifying processes of Reason as to take the character of exact history." Plutarch suggests that while the end product of his account will not have the same status as a thoroughly researched and well documented history, it will aspire to a limited threshold of rational coherence and consistency and thereby seek to reflect at least minimal standards of scholarly practice.

Similarly, one can see that Montesquieu distills from these accounts matter that can allow for a reasonable assessment of the basic conditions of Greece at the time and of the broad characteristics of the actions of the political heroes, but in the service of an account of institutional patterns and generalizations rather than an account of extraordinary individuals. So, for example, while sidestepping questions addressed by Plutarch about the veracity of the story of the Minotaur and Ariadne, Montesquieu does acknowledge that the heroism of Theseus, however acquired, required a background of tribal rivalries, hostilities and a general absence of the

²⁰ Robert Lamberton, *Plutarch* (New Haven and London, 2001), Part II.

²¹ "Theseus," *Plutarch's Lives*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Clough (New York, 2001), p. 1.

rule of law, a picture validated by the background of other accounts of heroes such as Hercules.²² Despite the differing focus and purpose of the accounts, both Plutarch and Montesquieu have a certain affinity in their approaches in downplaying the miraculous and supernatural in the traditional accounts and looking for the more general features that appear to have greater reliability.

Still, it must be acknowledged initially that Plutarch and Montesquieu approach their discussions of ancient republicanism with different purposes in mind. In the case of Plutarch, it has been recognized that one cannot paint all of the *Lives* with the same intentional brush, so to speak, but that different lives were written with quite different intentions, some to be more strictly historical and explanatory, some for more hortatory purposes in the demonstration of good character and so on.²³ In the case of Solon, whose life is presented in tandem with that of Poplicola, one of the important purposes of the parallel as stated by Plutarch is to show how lives not only compare, but also how they are interconnected, insofar as the work of Poplicola contributed to Solon's glory through Poplicola's act of imitation, and setting himself up as an enemy of tyranny in order to consolidate a republican regime.²⁴ The laws set up for the purpose, described by Montesquieu as the republican regulation of morals, are presented by Plutarch within a long list of legislative initiatives which he does not designate as having any particular unifying theme, even though a great number have to do with the regulation of the activities of women. In Montesquieu's case, the parallel of Solon and Poplicola does not serve, as it did for Plutarch, to demonstrate the lack of relative independence of

²² Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes*, XXIV.18. ed. Roger Caillois (Paris, 1951), p. 728. Future references to *L'Esprit des lois* will come from this edition and will only cite the book, chapter and page number. All English translations of *EL* are from Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, tr. Cohler, Miller & Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). All other translations are by the editors (Sparling & Bourgauf), unless otherwise stated.

²³ "a writer's programmatic statements can sometimes be a poor guide to his work, and some *Lives* fit Plutarch's theory better than others. Any account of the *Lives* must bring out their versatility. It must find room for Caesar, which is not straightforwardly moralistic or personal but is certainly historical. It must include *Lives* which break away from the constrictions of a single man's Life, as Antony moves its attention to Cleopatra, or as Brutus often divides its interest between Brutus and Cassius. It must find room for different types of moral interest: the explicit praise and blame of Cato, or the subtler and more tragic insights of Antony. Other *Lives* again—Crassus, perhaps, or Sertorius—are simply less ambitious and less richly textured. This biographical genre is an extremely flexible one, and admits works of very different patterns." Christopher Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation of his Source Material," In *Plutarch and History* (London, 2002), p. 106.

²⁴ Plutarch, "Comparison of Poplicola with Solon," p. 144.

political action (given that these actions can often be parasitic on the glory of others); rather, the parallel works at a more general level to provide an analytical overview of the necessities of republican regimes per se.

As we noted earlier, Montesquieu made a note to himself about the need to read the Theseus account written by Plutarch in order to develop his "system of liberty". What is curious about this is that while Plutarch's account of political liberty generally revolves around the struggle against tyranny, as in the case of the conspiracy against Caesar, there is little discussion of freedom in Plutarch's account of the founding of the Athenian republic. Plutarch's discussion of Theseus focuses on his actions in unifying the Athenians and in defending them for a time by outsmarting their enemies. His brief reference to institutional innovations in the founding of the republic highlights the centrality of inclusiveness and equality with the subtle but necessary innovation of established distinctions within the more general rank of citizen. There is no express invocation of political freedom here:

...he laid down his regal power and proceeded to order a commonwealth... Farther yet designing to enlarge his city, he invited all strangers to come and enjoy equal privileges with the natives, and it is said that the common form, *Come hither, all ye people*, were the words that Theseus proclaimed when he thus set up a commonwealth, in a manner, for all nations. Yet he did not suffer his state, by the promiscuous multitude that flowed in, to be turned into confusion and be left without any order or degree, but was the first that divided the Commonwealth into three distinct ranks, the noblemen, the husbandmen, and artificers. To the nobility he committed the care of religion, the choice of magistrates, the teaching and dispensing of the laws, and interpretation and direction in all sacred matters; the whole city being, as it were, reduced to an exact equality, the nobles excelling the rest in honour, the husbandmen in profit, and the artificers in number. And that Theseus was the first, who, as Aristotle, says, out of an inclination to popular government, parted with regal power, Homer also seems to testify...²⁵

Montesquieu also refers frequently to Plutarch's life of Solon to help fill in his picture of republican regimes. Perhaps foremost among his references, is Solon's famous pronouncement that he did not tailor his laws to some ideal of the best regime, but gave Athenians "The best [laws] they could receive," suggesting that the best legislator is one who has a better understanding of the population and conditions for which laws are being drafted.²⁶

²⁵ Plutarch, "Theseus," pp. 15–16.

²⁶ Plutarch, "Solon," p. 115 and Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, XIX, 21. "On demanda à Solon si les lois qu'il avoit données aux Atheniens étoient les meilleures: Je leur ai donné,

The theme of liberty more clearly comes to the fore in Plutarch's account of Solon, for it was Solon who abolished the debt called *Seisachthea* which allowed the creditor to enslave the debtor in the case of non-payment.²⁷ As Plutarch relates, Solon divided citizens into four classes based on wealth, but assured that even the poorest class of *Thetes* had access to both the assembly and the courts as jurors. Plutarch suggests that the remission of debts was both unique to Solon and the chief means by which he worked to confirm the liberty of the citizens:

for a mere law to give all men equal rights is but useless, if the poor must sacrifice those rights to their debts, and, in the very seats and sanctuaries of equality, the courts of justice, the offices of state, and the public discussions, be more than anywhere at the beck and bidding of the rich.²⁸

This suggests that Plutarch acknowledged both that equality was an important precondition for the exercise of political liberty, and that the particular form of equality most relevant to free political action was linked in important ways to economic independence.

Montesquieu accepts Plutarch's insight that economic and political equality are necessary conditions for a well-functioning republican form of government. In Book XII, devoted to a discussion of political liberty, Montesquieu raises Plutarch's point, citing his life of Solon, acknowledging how fundamental it was to republican liberty that no one be sold into slavery for reasons of debt.²⁹ Still, in general Montesquieu also appears to be more stringent than Plutarch in what he regards to be the form of equality most appropriate to republican practice. For example, he remarks in chapters 6 and 7 of Book IV that a leader seeking to institute a republic needs to ban money, even though that is not an accurate description of Plutarch's *Lycurgus*, who only made the currency so heavy and burdensome that it became a liability for commerce and public display. In addition, Montesquieu suggests in V, 5 that Solon's innovations with regard to the inheritance law, that is allowing those without family to legate their property to whomever they chose, was a violation of the spirit of equality he sought to instill through other measures. In contrast, this is a measure on which Plutarch lavishes great praise, "... he by permitting them, if they had no children, to bestow it on whom they pleased, showed

répondit-il, les meilleures de celles qu'ils pouvoient souffrir.' Belle parole, qui devoit être entendue de tous les législateurs."

²⁷ Plutarch, "Solon," p. 116.

²⁸ Plutarch, "Comparison of Poplicola with Solon," p. 145.

²⁹ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, XII, 21, p. 450.

that he esteemed friendship a stronger tie than kindred, and affection than necessity; and made every man's estate truly his own".³⁰ Also, while Plutarch praises the innovation of Solon that gave all citizens, even the most destitute, access to the courts and assembly, a rule that for Plutarch expressed a fundamental commitment to political equality, Montesquieu suggests that by not allowing the most destitute access to the magistracy as well, Solon was again compromising his commitment to equality. In this instance, Montesquieu suggests that this was a political compromise that worked to consolidate and ensure the longer term viability of the regime by not imposing a requirement for civic service on a group who would harm themselves economically by taking time away from their regular occupations.³¹ So generally, in matters of both economic and political equality as conditions for republican governance, Montesquieu has a tendency to call for more extreme and stringent forms than those discussed in Plutarch's accounts of republican founders.

This raises interesting interpretative questions with regard to the larger issue of Montesquieu's place within what has been called "the Greek tradition in republican thought".³² Montesquieu's position has been allied to that of Harrington (for whom Plutarch was also an important source) in favouring a Greek model of republicanism for which the avoidance of extremes in wealth was considered more central to civic well-being and justice than an ideal of freedom as non-domination, or popular participation, often regarded as more central to the early Roman republican model. This would certainly explain Montesquieu's tendency, as we shall see, to neglect or at least not to actively address much of the Roman experience in his discussion of ancient republics. However, given a general view of Harrington's more moderate take on the ancient Greek model, suggesting that instead of Agrarian laws and active redistribution of wealth one only need to avoid extreme inequalities of wealth to maintain a well-functioning republic, there is more to be said about Montesquieu's relation to this model. If his model was more Plato's *Laws* than Harrington or even Plutarch, it is certainly not the case that Montesquieu adopts it in the same Platonic spirit of offering an unambiguous normative model based on a thick understanding of human nature and moral virtue.³³ What we

³⁰ Plutarch, "Solon", p. 120 and Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, V, 5, p. 277.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³² Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004).

³³ While Nelson's analysis has much to commend it, I think that his argument that Montesquieu's notion of political virtue can be considered in an unproblematic way as

see slowly emerging is the picture of an appropriation of Greek republican history that appears to accentuate if not exaggerate the features that most distinguish it from contemporary mores (more Greek than the Greeks . . .) while minimizing the metaphysical framework through which those features were more fully comprehensible in the ancient accounts.

In addition to practices of economic and political equality and political liberty, Montesquieu distills from Plutarch's narration of Solon's life the idea that republican regimes seek to regulate the morals of citizens, although this is not an idea about which Plutarch is fully explicit. Montesquieu also suggests that the laws of Lycurgus carry the assumption that citizens will be highly attentive of one another ("... a strong practice of mutual surveillance"), something impossible in a larger population given the diversity of occupations and the opportunities for distraction.³⁴ Mutual surveillance was encouraged by Lycurgus through laws requiring common meals among the citizens, a key feature of Spartan life about which Montesquieu, again, remains curiously silent. Still, Montesquieu does acknowledge in more general terms this aspect of Spartan life in Book XIX, chapter 16: "Always correcting or being corrected, always instructing and being instructed, as simple as they were rigid, these people practiced virtues for each other, rather than showing them regard." In noting that this will only be possible in a smaller state where the general education of citizens is done in the spirit of raising a single family, Montesquieu highlights an important distinction between republican and monarchical regimes. While Montesquieu's monarchical honour, may also be said to require the attentiveness of one citizen to another, the difference between this honour and the mutual surveillance associated with republican virtue is that in the case of republicanism, the attentiveness works in a highly normalized fashion in a way that motivates citizens to hide distinctions and to actualize their sense of equality in an outward show of homogeneity.³⁵

a component and hence a stand-in for the invocation of a Platonic conception of moral virtue is deeply flawed, especially given that Montesquieu did not show any preference for the contemplative life (as Nelson remarks in a footnote). In addition, it is not at all clear that Montesquieu's praise of ancient republics is based on the idea that they more fully correspond to a regulative ideal of a fulfillment of human nature. It would appear, rather, that republics are revered by Montesquieu for consequentialist reasons, i.e. for what men in these regimes were able to accomplish, over the state or condition of men's souls. Ibid., p. 176.

³⁴ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, IV, 7, p. 270.

³⁵ As noted by Plutarch, "For the rich, being obliged to go to the same table with the poor, could not make use of or enjoy their abundance, nor so much as please their vanity by looking at or displaying it. So that the common proverb, that Plutus, the god of riches,

The attentiveness of citizens one to another in a monarchical regime works in order to accentuate distinctions and to motivate citizens to show outwardly what differentiates each one from the other.

There are also circumstances where Montesquieu extends the historical sensibilities of Plutarch to provide a more thorough explanation of the laws unique to Solon. Both authors single out as extraordinary the Solonic law which disfranchised all those who declared themselves to be neutral in a matter of sedition or revolt. In seeking to provide an account of this law, Plutarch suggests that Solon had the intention to ensure that every citizen took the public good seriously, and to avoid citizen absorption into their own private affairs.³⁶ In comparison, Montesquieu delves into the matter seeking a deeper social scientific explanation. He suggests that in the context of the ancient world, the forcing of full citizen participation in matters of public controversy ensured that those who had a greater tendency to moderation (a small number among the multitude) would enter into public debate and thereby help to avoid some of the political extremism spearheaded by large factions. He suggests that in contrast in modern monarchical governments potentially subversive parties will be very small with the vast number of individuals seeking to stay outside of the public arena. In this instance, the people's lethargy would itself suffice as a moderating factor, thereby suggesting that there was no need of such a law in modern times, and that it would indeed appear to be extraordinary to the modern observer.³⁷

Through point of contrast, rather than continuity, Montesquieu acknowledges the less engaged political ethos of his own era, but as a matter of sociological necessity rather than political decline "... the people want to live a life of inaction". The contrast is overtly structured as a contrast of regimes, much like Constant characterized Montesquieu's work. Still, the more subtle idea of specifically *historical* comparison, that is one with the past of European culture in mind, rather than a purer one of comparative cultures, surfaces in the title of the chapter, "That laws

is blind, was nowhere in all the world literally verified but in Sparta. There, indeed, he was not only blind, but like a picture, without either life or motion. Nor were they allowed to take food at home first, and then attend the public tables, for every one had an eye upon those who did not eat and drink like the rest, and reproached them with being dainty and effeminate." "Lycurgus", p. 61. For further discussion about the distinction between Montesquieu's notion of honour and virtue see my *Public Passion: rethinking the grounds for political justice* (Montreal, 2011).

³⁶ Plutarch, "Solon," p. 119.

³⁷ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, XXIX, 3, pp. 866–67.

which seem to diverge from the aims of the legislator often conform to them", acknowledging that there are more general conclusions that may hold across these two periods, in part in the ruling tendency to orchestrate through legislation the most effective way to minimize and/or neutralize sedition. In the modern era, Montesquieu is suggesting, the time of mass mobilization in view of important political reform appears to be over, in part due to the much larger size of states. Knowledge of the Greek past and of the reasons why people were forced to take sides in Athens serves in the present as a reminder that the possibilities for revolt issuing in massive political change are rare and that it takes very little to deflect momentum, "thus it is that the fermentation of one liquor can be checked by a single drop of a different one."³⁸

III. *Montesquieu, Plutarch and the Lives of the Romans*

In general, Montesquieu's references to Plutarch's *Lives* of the great Romans appear to be much fewer than references to the Greeks, particularly where the nature and principle of republican institutions are concerned.³⁹ This is particularly curious given his earlier published account of Roman history in his *Considérations*.⁴⁰ While Plutarch scholars acknowledge that Plutarch's knowledge of Roman history was something he came to latterly and more quickly, Montesquieu certainly trusted Plutarch as a source about Rome given that his work is cited throughout the *Considérations*. Given this, it is unlikely also that what has been surmised to be the Augustan interpretation of history dominating Plutarch's work was not to Montesquieu's liking.⁴¹ It may be then that Montesquieu was himself unsure of the extent to which the example of Rome represented an ideal paradigm of what he was seeking to portray in his depiction of the spirit of republicanism. Rome may have been distinguished by an early policy seeking to redistribute lands and generate a substantial social and economic equality. However, the counterpart to extensive policing of morals and ongoing regulation of wealth do not appear to have as central a place

³⁸ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, XXIX, 3, p. 867.

³⁹ His preference as a reference to republican Rome appears to be the work of Denys d'Halicarnasse.

⁴⁰ Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. R. Caillois (Paris, 1958).

⁴¹ The identification of Plutarch's account with an Augustan interpretation of history is argued by Christopher Jones in *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford, 1971).

in the development of Rome in comparison to republican counterparts in Athens and Sparta. Insofar as Rome represented an aristocratic possibility of republicanism it was relevant to his discussion, but in many instances Rome figures in Montesquieu's discussion of republics as a misguided example that failed to do what was really necessary to make it a viable regime.⁴² For example, Rome failed to distinguish and fix its citizen class and instead expanded the citizen class along with the expansion of the empire (II, 2). As Montesquieu tells us, this contributed significantly to the fall of the Roman republic.⁴³ Similarly, the introduction of a secret ballot precipitated the fall of the republic in Rome, as related by Cicero, and the decimvir law banning marriage between patricians and plebeians helped to undermine the limited equality established in the aristocracy.⁴⁴ It also should be noted in this context that all his ancient references to policies of education for instilling republican virtue relate to ancient Greece and not Rome. Montesquieu, as it has already been intimated above in the discussion of his selective use of the texts of Plutarch, had a particular model of historical republicanism in mind when constructing his model that corresponded to a rather stringent set of characteristics.

Montesquieu's references to Romulus are scant and he provides no direct reference to Plutarch's life of Romulus. Indeed Plutarch himself provides very little discussion of republican institutions in his account of Romulus focusing instead on his subduing of neighbouring peoples and tribes. Still an essential feature of Roman republicanism attributed to the actions of Romulus by Montesquieu, though not mentioned in Plutarch's essay on Romulus, (and Montesquieu does not note the source he uses in this reference in V, 5) is the division of land into not only equal, but small portions. This division of the parcels of land would of course solidify a commitment to social equality as essential for a republican ethos.⁴⁵ Montesquieu does note Plutarch's reference to the equality of land portions in his comparison of Numa and Lycurgus. Furthermore, in XXVII, 1, he explores the history of land succession laws in Rome, acknowledging differences within general republican practice, and the recognition that the legal innovations in Rome that granted to any citizen the right to leave

⁴² "Rome, qui fut dans les premiers temps, une espèce d'aristocratie . . ."; Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, II, 3, p. 245.

⁴³ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, II, 2, p. 240.

⁴⁴ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, II, 2, p. 243 and V, 8, p. 285.

⁴⁵ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, V, 6, p. 279.

property to anyone of choice (unlike Athens where this right was only granted to those without children), served again, ultimately to undermine the republican ethos. It would appear by these and other remarks noted above that Montesquieu is ready to suggest an addendum to his thesis about the decline of Rome argued in the *Considérations*. It was not only predatory impulses and expansionist policies that undermined the republic, but also several public features, including neglect of education for citizenship and succession laws that did not protect the initial equalizing impulse of Rome's founders.

IV. *Montesquieu, ancient republics and European history:
the past is another country?*

The exploration of Montesquieu's use of Plutarch's work to explore the contours of ancient republicanism, while useful in gaining a better understanding of Montesquieu's selective and judicious use of texts, can help to shed light on a more fundamental issue. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Constant was critical of broad trends in Enlightenment historiography for providing little delineation between the past and the present, thereby paving the way for the impulse to resuscitate ancient forms in the modern context. Montesquieu's analysis was subject to a more muted criticism by Constant. Constant praised Montesquieu for treating the ancient world as a different category, but suggested that the differences he identified should be acknowledged as differences of time and context rather than ones of regime type. So in broad terms, Constant discerns in Montesquieu the appropriate concern to hem in or cordon off the past and thereby to limit its ability to serve as a regulative or critical beacon for a different context in the present.

Separate from the question of whether this is indeed possible in a pure way (or indeed whether Constant's rhetoric itself belied an impulse to reintroduce certain aspects of ancient citizenship through the back-door) is the analytic and perhaps preliminary question of how we approach the question of comparing different social and cultural settings in relation to historical comparison. In many instances, commentators on social scientific methods have treated the past as a sort of quarry allowing social scientists the ability to extend their possible set of case studies, and suggesting that there is no discernable difference between the comparison of two distinct cultural or political circumstances and the comparison of circumstances in two different time periods. Certainly, the tone of these

comparisons may depend to a large degree on the spirit in which they are engaged. Still, the question I ask here is whether there might be something essentially different about engaging in historical analysis of a context preceding one's own as opposed to the analysis of a distinct culture. This question precedes those concerning the interpretative disposition one chooses to adopt. To restate the question in the language of hermeneutics is to ask whether the study of circumstances informing the horizons of one's own perspective requires a somewhat different approach and understanding than that resorted to when those circumstances explored are quite different and farther removed from one's own cultural context. If interpretative social science can be described as a process of understanding, is it possible to suggest that understanding can take different forms, some in the bridging of very different world views through experience of a common humanity, and some in the account of difference given a common context? In reference to Montesquieu, then, does the fact that the history of republicanism is clearly a predecessor to monarchical culture within the broader context of European history imply that it functions in his analysis in a manner that is quite distinct from examples of different cultural contexts such as China?

We might say that the republican past as invoked by the examples of Greece and Rome portrayed by Montesquieu through his selective use of Plutarch shows us several things. In the first instance, we could surmise that Montesquieu already had a particular model in mind when coming to the reading of the ancient history of republicanism, one with which the tales of ancient Greece fit more nicely than those of Rome which often appears on the margins and exceptional to republican norms. We can recall that Montesquieu reminded himself in his reading notes to consult Plutarch's lives of Solon and Lycurgus to help support and shape his system of liberty. This model of republicanism, although clearly informed by the classical stories, also gravitated to the most austere and stringent accounts of republican practice at least in terms of those recounted by Plutarch. In addition, Montesquieu sought to divert Plutarch's emphasis on the important agency of great men in the shaping of these regimes, seeking instead to focus on the broader force of the institutional norms they introduced. But while appearing to fashion a model that was almost diametrically opposed to modern conditions as he conceptualized them, the model of republicanism fashioned by Montesquieu was not regarded as a regime with completely distinct rules of functioning that had no relevance at all to the contemporary situation. While a conscious interpretative choice, Montesquieu did not let the separation of ancient practices from the ethos of modern monarchy dictate their irrelevance for his times.

Instead, their status as a past example and way of life provided a critical force to his analysis.

To demonstrate this we need only to revisit those passages where a direct juxtaposition of the principles of virtue and honour are made. Consider the famous passage of III, 3:

The political men of Greece who lived under popular government recognized no other force to sustain it than virtue. Those of today speak to us only of manufacturing, commerce, finance, wealth, and even luxury.⁴⁶

We can see several things going on in this passage in relation to the themes discussed here. On the one hand, Montesquieu continues with his rather stark dichotomy between republican and monarchical forms, with an initial implicit sense that 'today' provides a context and set of conditions that must be judged by a completely different set of norms. Nonetheless, the interpretative structure invoked by a comparison of past and present requires that these differences be accounted for given some underlying shared conditions. This raises the prospect of both better and worse ways to deal with the same underlying conditions, a structure of analysis that harbours greater potential for critical judgment. Thus, the tone of nostalgia evoked here and in several other points in the text where Montesquieu is comparing the mores of ancient and contemporary times in Europe is arguably not just an analytic choice that could surface in relation to any social scientific comparison, but is one which becomes a real and unique tool of critical reflection in relation to one's own history. And while nostalgia may not in itself signify the wish of a return or reinstatement of the older way of life, it does carry greater critical force than the judgement that life in another context or country has merits unmatched in one's own context, because with nostalgia comes the sense that those who brought about the transition to the present in some limited sense bear some responsibility for the loss of that which was good.

Montesquieu's use of Plutarch demonstrates the way in which historical reflection can serve the cause of political theory. First, one of the unique characteristics of historical reflection as opposed to cross-cultural comparison, is that the differences highlighted can have an extra potency of critical potential vis-à-vis the present given that the differences can represent a more authentic form of alternative than that apparent in another cultural context. When considering cultural specificities, Montesquieu sometimes acknowledges the very exceptionalism embedded in those

⁴⁶ Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, II, 3, p. 252.

examples, such as his discussion of the workings of despotism in China that is extraordinarily offset by the particular dynamic of mores in the Chinese context.⁴⁷ Ancient Greece and Rome do not stand as exceptions in his analysis, but as understandable possibilities. Regardless of their status as likely alternatives, the fact that they stand as examples for direct comparison make their critical potential greater.

Second, despite this, the practice of historical reflection and political theorizing can remain separate insofar as the theorist needs to choose how much theoretical advantage to take from the potential of historical criticism, by either transforming the alternative into a stance of political advocacy, repudiation, or mere nostalgia. With regard to ancient republicanism and the work of Plutarch, Montesquieu chose the latter, particularly considering those statements where he praises the great actions and deeds of the ancient republicans in contrast to the petty mindedness of his contemporaries motivated by honour. Third, then, historical analysis of a society's own past can be a powerful and indeed necessary tool of social analysis and political theory, though a historical perspective is not obviously sufficient to generate a critical perspective.

So Constant was misguided in suggesting that the treatment of past circumstances as their own unique and distinct pattern was sufficient to rob them of their critical potential in the present. In examining the issue more closely we can see that by virtue of these circumstances being historical (as the past of one's own cultural circumstances) there will be a propensity to judge the quality of those relative manifestations as well as to acknowledge some collective responsibility for subsequent changes. In this structure the writer has several choices: to call for a return for what was lost given a judgment of the superiority of past practice; to call for a rejection of the past and a clinging to the present and future if the present is judged to represent great progress in relation to the past; or to acknowledge an element of superiority in past practices, while also acknowledging that a return to that model is not viable, hence nostalgia. Montesquieu's selective use of Plutarch demonstrates that the work of historical reflection, in developing a distinct and unique vision of one's own past, can be fully compatible with work of contemporary criticism.

⁴⁷ On this point see Catherine Volpilhac-Augier's "On the Proper Use of the Stick: The Spirit of Laws and the Chinese Empire" In Rebecca Kingston, ed. *Montesquieu and His Legacy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 81–96.

5. VOLTAIRE: POLEMICAL POSSIBILITIES OF HISTORY

Síofra Pierse

Introduction

What could have prompted Voltaire, *philosophe*, poet, playwright, social climber and justice campaigner extraordinaire, to style himself not just as a prolific historian, but also as a committed historiographer?¹ Can one ascertain the nature and purpose of Voltaire's foray into history? Was the undertaking a success? What type of legacy did this Enlightenment historian actually leave to posterity?²

This chapter attempts to answer those questions by tracing Voltaire's historiographical and historical trajectories and by gauging their role within the wider parameters of his immensely prolific career.³ The aim is to assess the impact of his historical and historiographical writings in terms of history, politics and philosophy.⁴ While Voltaire *philosophe* is most usually remembered nowadays as author of the *conte philosophique* *Candide* and as a vocal human rights activist, it is precisely that same ironic narrative fluency so typical of *Candide*, combined with an inherent fundamental scepticism, and a keen sense of social justice and advocacy

¹ In this chapter "historiography" refers to Voltaire's writings on the theory and methodology of the writing of history.

² It is fortunate that recent interest in Voltaire's history and historiography can now be further facilitated by the availability of new critical editions of his complete works that are being systematically published as part of the *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire/Complete Works of Voltaire* (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford, 1968–) project currently ongoing at the Voltaire Foundation, Oxford [henceforth OCV]. Where histories have not yet been published in this edition, the most convenient reference is René Pomeau, *Œuvres historiques* (Paris, 1957) and Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. Pomeau, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963). For those historical or historiographical works not included in the any of the above, it is advisable to return to an earlier edition of Voltaire's complete works: *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Louis Moland, 52 vols. (Paris, 1877–1885).

³ For detailed studies of Voltaire's forays into history and historiography respectively, see John H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford, 1958); Furio Diaz, *Voltaire storico* (Turin, 1958); and Síofra Pierse, *Voltaire historiographer: narrative paradigms* (Oxford, 2008).

⁴ Critics who have profitably explored Voltaire's histories in a broader Enlightenment context include: Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997) and Suzanne Gearhart, *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction: A Critical Approach to the French Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1984).

of religious tolerance which bubbles to the surface and drives Voltaire's historical vision.

Critical to the core, Voltaire was simply unable to engage with any *genre* without also analysing it, and devising his own definition and model. In Voltaire's opinion, as viewed through the critical prism of a *philosophe*, the ground rules for historiography in terms of approach, organisation and vision, simply cried out for reform. So how does an enflamed, controversial, often biting, and deeply ironic scribbler of letters and pamphlets deal with the constraints of such an august genre as early modern history? Commenting on Voltaire's decades-long engagement with historiography, Jeroom Vercruysse observes that the topic is boundless.⁵ When Voltaire decides to engage with the writing of history, he first reads voraciously, then synthesises, writes and theorises. Although he is influenced by earlier or contemporary historians from Bossuet through Lenglet du Fresnoy, and he uses a myriad other histories as source material, Voltaire systematically rejects contemporary histories as too focused on military history, or dates and battles, and far too lengthy.⁶ Instead, following in the spirit of Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734),⁷ Voltaire aspires to write history with an enlightened, philosophical focus: "a history of human customs and behaviour".⁸ His new type of history purports to engage more with politics, economics, humanity and philosophy, thus bringing together past, present and future within the text of history.⁹ Through a study of past societies and political systems, Voltaire's aim is to demonstrate the measured drive of humanity towards human civilisation and progress. The result is a tale of sporadic forays into historiography, interspersed with concise works of history that are at once attractive, impressive and "philosophic".¹⁰

⁵ Voltaire, "Historiographe", in *Œuvres alphabétiques I*, ed. Jeroom Vercruysse, in *OCV*, 33 (Oxford, 1987), pp. 215–220 (p. 215).

⁶ For discussion of historical and historiographical influences on Voltaire, see Ira O. Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* (Princeton, 1969).

⁷ Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède de, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (Amsterdam, 1734). The gulf between Montesquieu's "esprit des lois" [spirit of the laws] and Voltaire's "esprit du temps" [spirit of the time] is neatly identified by O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 41–43.

⁸ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, in *Œuvres historiques*, pp. 603–1220 (p. 723).

⁹ Pierre Force has recently argued in favour of the fact that Voltaire was "an unabashed presentist". Pierre Force, "Voltaire and the Necessity of Modern History", in *Modern Intellectual History* (2009), 6:457–484 (460).

¹⁰ John Burrow, *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century* (London, 2007), p. 342.

It must be recognised that, at the outset, Voltaire's engagement with history was partially an exercise in self-advancement. Conscious of the fact that any great early-modern writer should typically write in all three of the literary *grands genres*, the young Voltaire who already excelled in poetry and tragedy was keen to add history to his portfolio. In this way, his works formed a triad that neatly rounded off his profile as a noteworthy *homme de lettres*. Regardless of later, more altruistic stimuli, the sculpting of his self-image for posterity was considerable initial motivation for launching into the composition of what would ultimately become a prodigious historical output. Subsequently, Voltaire gained the support of Mme de Pompadour, whose influence ensured that Louis XV grudgingly appointed Voltaire to the prestigious court position of Royal Historiographer (1745). The literary tones of contemporary history suited Voltaire, and this is one aspect that makes his histories stand out today. While his contemporaries were equally aware of the necessity to write well, they were not all equally successful in this regard: "From Rabin to Fréron, one feature remains constant: the reminder that history is, first and foremost, literature".¹¹ Much later again, when Voltaire had settled in Geneva, the *philosophe* might arguably no longer have needed to engage with either history or historiography, since he was geographically distant from the French authorities and financially independent. Quite the reverse was the case. Voltaire's fascination with this *genre* remained paramount for him and, as John Leigh demonstrates, his passion imbued much of his non-historical writing as well.¹² Voltaire would continue to write and theorise upon history and historiography until his deathbed.¹³

In this chapter, Voltaire's historiographical and historical writings will be examined separately and in largely chronological fashion. Such a splitting is of course rather artificial, given that the histories are peppered with historiographical suggestions, comments and aspirations. Nonetheless, dividing the two corpora facilitates a contrast between Voltaire's historiographical theory and his actual production of history. This study will commence with consideration of Voltaire's key historiographical works and his articulation of an ideal methodology, beginning with *Remarques*

¹¹ Laurence Guellac and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, eds., *Des Voix dans l'Histoire* (Rennes, 2010), "Avant-propos", pp. 7–9 (p. 8).

¹² John Leigh, *Voltaire: a sense of history* (Oxford, 2004).

¹³ Many excellent biographies of Voltaire exist, but the most recent comprehensive anglophone biography is the concise and legible work by Roger Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty: a life in pursuit of freedom* (Paris, 2005). The French equivalent is René Pomeau et al., *Voltaire en son temps* (Oxford, 1988–1994), 5 vols.

sur l'histoire (1742) and *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* (1744). The study will continue through the later historiographical works, which culminate in the seminal article "Histoire" in the *Encyclopédie* (1765). Among Voltaire's more well-known historical works are *Histoire de Charles XII, roi de Suède* (1731), *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), *Histoire de la guerre de 1741* (1755), *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756), *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le grand* (2 vols.: 1759, 1763). However, many less well known but equally compelling historical texts exist, including the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* (1763), the *Histoire du parlement de Paris* (1769) and the *Fragments historiques sur l'Inde et sur le général de Lally* (1773–1774). The earlier works reveal a distinct literary quality that opens up the historical text and facilitates the insertion of extradiegetic issues that are arguably quite external to the textual focus. These topics include discussions of narrative, politics and truth within the work of history. Finally, the literary qualities of Voltaire's earlier histories will be contrasted with literary composition in the later works of the *engagé* campaigner, Voltaire the *patriarche de Ferney*. The *philosophe's* various campaigns for justice under the battle cry *Écraser l'infâme!* have a striking political impact and their echoes are to be found within the texts of Voltaire's later historical writing. The focus here is to present an overview of Voltaire's theoretical and practical historical writings: by its very nature, the process is inevitably selective.

I. Theory: Focus on Historiographical Works

Voltaire's vision of history evolved gradually and over many decades and the sheer extent to which the French *philosophe* engaged in theoretical historical writing is quite striking. Within his immense corpus, more than fourteen cohesive historiographical works exist, in addition to the numerous substantial textual musings on historiography which infuse his numerous works of history. A short overview will illustrate the doggedness with which Voltaire returns to historiography, although it is arguable that he never actually devises an easily-articulated overarching theory. Indeed, critics remain divided as to whether or not there exists an identifiable Voltairean historiographical methodology within his myriad musings on this topic.

This study, however, takes the view that it is indeed possible to identify six main rules of thumb within Voltaire's practical methodology for the writing of history. To the modern eye, some elements may seem slightly redundant, but the insistence on such rigour was noteworthy in its day.

Firstly, history must reject fiction and fantasy from the text and deal only with serious fact. Modern history must be accurate and *vraisemblable*: "History is the narrative of facts taken to be true."¹⁴

Secondly, history benefits from distance and hindsight. The immediacy of a subject deprives a historian of perspective and factual ingredients may be viewed as mutable until the death of a monarch or the passing of an era. However, because of Voltaire's constant textual or mental link to the present—as well as his predilection for writing histories on recent topics—it was difficult for him to adhere to this rule in his histories. Still, he candidly articulates the methodological problem: "it takes time for reputations to mature".¹⁵

Thirdly, history demands accurate sources. Modern editors of Voltaire's histories can concur that Voltaire was a very careful and thorough researcher, but the odd error and consultation of "second-hand" sources, has dogged his reputation during his life and beyond.¹⁶ Equally, his historical practice often fell short of his own declared high standards. Nonetheless, his rhetoric is one of rigorous checks and multiple sources: "I have a copy of it in my own hands"¹⁷ or "substantiated evidence of eye-witnesses".¹⁸

Fourthly, the historian must smooth an uneven tale into neat narrative form. When overwhelmed with detail, it is the historian's job to filter and synthesise: "history has space only for scant detail."¹⁹ Natural unevenness in events must be smoothed over in the writing of history with the writer embracing both exciting and quiet times, or peaks and troughs, within the historical narrative.

Fifthly, every historian must write clearly and without evident authorial bias. Voltaire censures certain of his sources because they are partisan: "such accusations, so often repeated and without any proof, read more like the protestations of a weak cabal than actual historical evidence."²⁰ Once again, the gulf between the theory and the practice is often a gaping one, especially given Voltaire's journalistic tendencies, or indeed his

¹⁴ "Histoire", in *Œuvres alphabétiques*, ed. by Jerom Vercruysse, in *OCV*, 33 (Oxford, 1987), pp. 164–186 (p. 164).

¹⁵ Voltaire, *Siècle*, p. 1012.

¹⁶ Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*, p. 167.

¹⁷ Voltaire, *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, in *OH*, pp. 1297–1571 (p. 1304).

¹⁸ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, II:756.

¹⁹ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, II:116.

²⁰ Voltaire, *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le grand*, ed. Michel Mervaud et al., in *OCV*, 46–47 (Oxford, 1999), II:745.

later overtly campaigning works of history. Nonetheless, his theoretical aspiration shows considered awareness of the difficulties facing historians of any era.

Finally, historiography demands brief analysis and is never a bare compilation of facts. Here Voltaire wishes to distinguish clearly between annalists and mere compilers of sources and, on the other hand, the narrators of history. Archives, lists and annals are of little interest to Voltaire other than as sources: “you must select that which is of use to you.”²¹ Synthesis is what the true historian performs when faced with valueless detail: “here is a sad summary of that event.”²² The analytical historical narrative is thus ultimately more liberated and more critical in nature and the historian has greater textual freedom, and a concomitant responsibility.

These six cornerstones of historiography emerge from a lifetime of writing and revision, and from both theoretical and practical experiences of history. The following overview returns to trace the gradual development of Voltaire’s writings on the theory of history across the decades.

1.1 *Designated historiographical pieces*

Voltaire cuts his historiographical teeth with the twin pieces *Remarques sur l'histoire* (1742) and *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* (1744). Both texts are free-standing dedicated pieces of historiography, composed deliberately to address issues surrounding the writing of history. In the recent critical edition for the *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet suggests that the *Remarques* were perhaps a response to historian Charles Rollin’s epic *Histoire ancienne*.²³ In reality, when writing *Remarques sur l'histoire* in 1742, Voltaire was responding obliquely and sarcastically to Rollin, while also engaging in dialogue with many other contemporary, recent and ancient historians. Both *Remarques sur l'histoire* and the *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* thus have their genesis in Voltaire’s growing historical awareness. Through them, he sets out on a new foray into the rather undeveloped world of mid-century philosophical historiography. At the same time, he was already deeply involved in writing *Siècle de Louis XIV*, had even begun to sketch his project for the

²¹ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, I:196.

²² Voltaire, *Précis*, p. 1506.

²³ Voltaire, *Remarques sur l'histoire*, ed. by Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet, in *Œuvres de 1842–1745 (II)*, in OCV, 28B (Oxford, 2008), pp. 143–164.

mammoth *Essai sur les mœurs*, and was busily polishing his craft in order to gain his court appointment at Versailles.

While the *Remarques sur l'histoire* are somewhat preliminary, the more weighty *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* appeared just two years later. By now, Voltaire was already keenly involved in his own historical trajectory. The methodology outlined in *Nouvelles considérations* is exacting and well-honed and it lays the foundations both for Voltaire's outline vision of "l'histoire moderne" and for what he promotes as his ground-breaking new universal history, the *Essai sur les mœurs*. Those principal tenets would inform the *philosophe's* historiographical vision for subsequent decades. For Voltaire, the basic foundation of historiography must involve the total rejection of fictitious, *invraisemblable* elements in history. Writing in the wake of Dom Mabillon and his influential *De Re Diplomatica* (1681), Voltaire underscores the importance of accurate sources, and thus questions the value of ancient history, which he accuses of containing: "a few truths alongside a thousand lies."²⁴ Voltaire also asserts a determination to focus on the instructive aspect of movements in history, whether concerning politics, power, wealth, culture, mores, law, or population shifts: "knowledge that is more sensitive and of more long-term use."²⁵ The historian targets an intellectual audience who read: "as both citizen and philosopher."²⁶ For that audience, the historian will write critical history: "as a true politician and a true philosopher."²⁷ In Voltaire's case, the writer of history was essentially and at all times politician, polemicist and critical thinker.²⁸ Voltaire declares his desire to probe into the soul of a country and discover "l'histoire des hommes" through history, rather than merely unearthing or repeating miserable titbits about king or court.²⁹ It is his novel and steadfast adhesion to a menu of the social and philosophical in history, rather than regal and annalistic elements, which will be the template for Voltairean historiography for the remainder of the writer's life.

Two late texts can be considered under the same broad umbrella of dedicated historiographical works, but they are diverse in terms of content,

²⁴ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire*, ed. by Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet, in *Œuvres de 1742–1745 (II)*, in *OCV*, 28B (Oxford, 2008), pp. 165–185 (p. 184); Jean Mabillon, *De Re diplomatica*, (Paris, 1681).

²⁵ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 180.

²⁶ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 183.

²⁷ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 184.

²⁸ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 184.

²⁹ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 184.

as well as title: *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765) and *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* (1769). To an extent, these texts exemplify the schism that exists between Voltaire's earlier interests and his later, substantially changed, focus and tone. For any reader post Hegel, the title of the *Philosophie de l'histoire* promises far more than it delivers. In reality, as editor John H. Brumfitt intimates, the title effectively denotes "the lessons which history teaches the *philosophe*".³⁰ For the most part, this text engages with the ancient world, despite Voltaire's reiterated emphasis on the importance of modern historical examples. Much of the text is based on previous work that Voltaire had initially undertaken with his intellectual partner the marquise Du Châtelet. This included critical analysis of the Bible and a return to inspirational ancient civilisations, including those of China and India, thus furnishing a foil to the contemporary concentration on Judeo-Christian exegesis. Despite its fiery tone, this text radiates a positivity concerning core values of human civilisation. Critic Jerome Rosenthal argues that the work represents Voltaire's philosophy of culture.³¹ From 1769 onwards, this piece would become the substantial new introduction to the universal history, *Essai sur les mœurs*.

In 1769 the second of two texts entitled *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, another work with a relatively misleading title, again attempts to challenge historical certainty. This time Voltaire writes as a firm disciple of Locke. Voltaire is well known for his scepticism, or even pyrrhonism—the belief that certain knowledge is impossible to obtain. In historical terms, this manifests itself as the impossibility of ever pinning down the precise truth of the details surrounding any historical event. In terms of writing history, Voltaire found such scepticism liberating, and *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* is especially invested with this sceptical approach to the past. This attitude would also inform his subsequent criticism of judicial verdicts where evidence is often far from conclusive and thus there is danger of a miscarriage of justice. In his histories, Voltaire invites the reader to question certain accounts of critical events past. The reader of Voltaire's version must then determine for her/himself which account is more likely. Particular attention is drawn to the dangers of intolerance, fanaticism and theological assumptions. The challenges are delivered in forceful tones,

³⁰ Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, ed. John H. Brumfitt, in *OCV*, 59 (Geneva; Toronto, 1969), p. 13.

³¹ Jerome Rosenthal, "Voltaire's Philosophy of History", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16:2 (1955), 151–178.

laden with fury and outrage, and particularly when confronting patent injustice.

I.2 *Preface and Postface historiography*

While the above texts are noteworthy because they are, at least nominally, solely dedicated to historiography, there also exists a wealth of historiographical opinions in a concatenation of texts that are either prefaces or postfaces to Voltaire's major historical works. For example, to accompany the work of history *Histoire de Charles XII*, Voltaire composed the *Discours sur l'Histoire de Charles XII* (1731), the "Lettre à monsieur Norberg" (1744), and his first "Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire" (1748).³² While this short "Pyrrhonisme" text insists on the necessity for verisimilitude in history, the letter to Norberg is one of many Voltairean kneejerk responses to negative criticism by an obscure and quite innocuous critic. In this case the target, Norberg, was the former chaplain to King Charles XII of Sweden and one of numerous authors who wrote accounts of that monarch's extraordinary reign. Norberg's own account of Charles XII lacks the suavity of a Voltairean narrative and his criticisms of Voltaire were often pedantic, if not all entirely unfounded. Ironically, Voltaire's riposte is largely that Norberg's criticism of his history is misplaced, petty and insignificant.

Similarly, Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* sparked a flurry of this postface-style historiographical writing, this time in the form of appendices to the core text, some clustered under the broad heading *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV* (1753). The criticism in the *Supplément* is addressed to La Beaumelle, following that author's publication of an annotated edition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, which he had produced in retaliation for Voltaire's recent exacerbation of a long-standing dispute while both were resident at the court of Frederick II in Potsdam. It could be said that these reflex responses to negative criticism of his works, even by poor commentators or mediocre journalists, were something of a Voltairean Achilles heel. Nonetheless, in addition to responding to La Beaumelle, the *Supplément* abounds in counsels of practical historiographical methodology and contains some memorable aphorisms.

In the *Supplément*, Voltaire writes that the first edition of his *Siècle de Louis XIV* included a request to his readers for further details and information on certain topics. He uses the artistic metaphor of an unfinished

³² Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII*, ed. Gunnar von Proschwitz, in *OCV*, 4 (Oxford, 1996).

painting: “in the hope that this work would inspire men of letters and men versed in public affairs to furnish the author with new shades and tints with which he might complete his painting.”³³ Voltaire writes very self-consciously of the process of re-writing history, thus providing for the reader a sort of metatext that reveals both his historical methodology and his acute sense of textual exegesis. The historian explains that upon receiving material, anecdote or opinion, he had to verify it, read the source for himself and judge it for himself: “in this way, two lines of text sometimes required two weeks of reading.”³⁴

In historiographical terms, criticisms by readers which involved errors of “discrete fact” were swiftly corrected by Voltaire, whereas criticisms that targeted his approach or methodology were met by tremendous sarcasm, rejection and scathing comment. La Beaumelle was rash enough to make the critical observation that there were insufficient character portraits in Voltaire’s *Siècle de Louis XIV*. To this, Voltaire retaliates with a lyrical rejection of character portraits in history, stating how inaccurate and superfluous they are, not least because a person’s character is continually in flux: “the character of each man is a chaos.”³⁵ Thus while undermining the character of La Beaumelle and other critics, Voltaire historiographer openly reflects upon and dissects his own historical methodology, if only to better defend himself from his detractors.

I.3 *Essai sur les mœurs*

As early as 1745, Voltaire produced his “Nouveau plan d’une histoire de l’esprit humain”. It was essentially a manifesto for what would become the *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*. In the plan, the historian laid out an entire pathway for his vision of universal history, including subject matter and methodology. In theoretical terms, the *Essai sur les mœurs* is a ground-breaking piece of work very much in Enlightenment mode. Voltaire proposed to write a riposte to Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s Judeo-Christian vision of world history as expounded in the latter’s *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* (1681). This was reflective of an Enlightenment desire to make history philosophical, as John Burrow intimates: “History as a sequence of stages, of states of society or of the human mind, was in a sense the ‘enlightened’ successor to the long-lived Christian universal

³³ Voltaire, *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, in *OH*, pp. 1221–74 (p. 1230).

³⁴ Voltaire, *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, in *OH*, pp. 1221–74 (p. 1230).

³⁵ Voltaire, *Siècle*, p. 1257.

history".³⁶ Thus, in a clear reaction against Bossuet's earlier universal history, Voltaire proffers a model for an all-embracing history in which the social and economic focus deliberately champions ancient China and India. Even more ambitiously, Voltaire's universal history does not proceed in a strictly chronological fashion, but instead traces movements or trends under the very broad rubric of the progress of humanity. As was the case for his other histories, a subsequent *Appendice* to the *Essai sur les mœurs* would evolve and emerge, comprising a succession of passages written either in self-defence, as responses to critics, or as introductions to later editions of the work.

Voltaire was anxious to emphasise that the *Essai sur les mœurs* was not just conceived in order to refute Bossuet's blinkered world-vision, but primarily to enhance the Marquise Du Châtelet's opinion of history. According to Voltaire, his intellectual partner, the marquise, was so disgusted by badly-written, meandering, list-filled works of history that she rejected the genre entirely. Voltaire rises to the challenge to counteract this misperception of the genre, while citing her objections: "I have rejected the idea of a vast, turgid study that would weigh down the soul rather than enlighten it."³⁷ In writing his universal history, Voltaire wished to make the work reliable, legible and enjoyable for the educated reader. Nevertheless, it must be noted that he primarily undertook the writing of the *Essai sur les mœurs* in a strong bid to impress the erudite and scientific Marquise Du Châtelet. Using the marquise's voice, the historian openly condemns one of his own sources, the historian Daniel, for "these endless accounts of battles."³⁸ What the modern reader registers is the immense amount of detail in this world history, all condensed into two short volumes. This staggering contraction never fails to strike any modern editor of Voltaire's histories. Critic Paul Sakmann declares the successful result to be: "large-scale, critically sifted, and treated in a philosophical spirit".³⁹ Given the number and volume of Voltaire's sources, the end product of *Essai sur les mœurs* is a magisterial work of compression, summary, synthesis and selectivity.⁴⁰

³⁶ Burrow, *A History of Histories*, p. 342.

³⁷ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, II:883.

³⁸ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, II:901.

³⁹ Paul Sakmann, "The Problems of Historical Method and of Philosophy of History in Voltaire", in *History and Theory* 2, 1971:24–59 (25).

⁴⁰ Olivier Ferret, Gianluigi Goggi and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, *Copier/Collier. Écriture et réécriture chez Voltaire* (Pisa, 2007).

In 1757, Voltaire released a general introduction, entitled *Préface historique et critique*, a full two years before publication of the first volume of the problematic commissioned work of history, *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le grand*. The prefatory work introduces the subject and also lays down some of the historian's aspirations in methodological terms. For example, Voltaire is keen to avoid reference to a monarch's personal weaknesses if they do not detract from his reign. Similarly, he reiterates his rejection of the textual portrait and insists that a history must be succinct and legible; thus excessive detail of war manoeuvres must be eschewed. The resultant two volumes were lengthy by Voltaire's standards, but compact in contemporary terms.

Indubitably the title of *Éclaircissements historiques à l'occasion d'un libelle calomnieux contre l'Essai sur les mœurs* (1763) tells its own story. In the same year, Voltaire published twenty-one detailed commentaries, *Remarques pour servir de supplément à l'Essai sur les mœurs*. Once again, these were intended to justify his project in the *Essai*, but also to further explain his methodology and expound upon his historiographical motivation. This again illustrates a Voltairean pattern: whenever Voltaire was forced into a defensive position, he took the time to progress and clarify his historiographical theories. In this way, his vision gradually became more concrete as well as persuasive.

I.4 *The historiographical metatext*

In addition to the dedicated historiographical works and the historiographical commentaries in prefaces and postfaces already mentioned, there also exists an entire corpus of surprise textual incursions and sallies into historiography which are sprinkled throughout the historical works themselves. They evince an overtly self-referential and deliberately self-conscious historiographical voice that is perhaps the most notable element of all of Voltaire's historiographical writing. It provides a metatext for the work of history in which it is couched. This historiographical metatext, together with prefaces, postfaces and distinct historiographical works, all combine to comprise Voltaire's relatively detailed historiographical methodology. In a bid to establish this methodology, Voltaire consistently defines himself in opposition to contemporary historians and insists on the importance of painstaking historical research. He rejects the inclusion of fantasy or *invraisemblance* within the historical text and instead at all times demands serious, verifiable historical facts. He has a very strong sense of the importance of the historical narrative: history must be

legible, and, moreover, an enjoyable read, in order to first entice and then influence the reader. Ultimately, facts alone are insufficient: history must proffer a modicum of commentary, entertainment and analysis, elements that Voltaire rarely fails to deliver.

As is evident from this brief overview, Voltaire never shies away from criticising other historians, whether ancient or contemporary. Moreover, it is clear from the outset that Voltaire visualised history as philosophical and for an enlightened readership. Part of this mould was determined by his reaction against the restrictions placed on the royal historian, and much of the design would evolve from experience garnered over the years, as the seminal *Encyclopédie* article will reveal.

II. Seminal Articles: 'Historiographe' and 'Histoire'

Voltaire's two articles "Historiographe" and "Histoire", both written in 1765 for Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* project, are central to the *philosophe's* historiographical trajectory as he navigates his way through contemporary history and historiography and carves his own niche in both fields.⁴¹

II.1 "Historiographe" article

Voltaire's article "Historiographe" was never actually published in the *Encyclopédie*, and critics remain undecided as to whether it was lost, refused, or sent back for revisions.⁴² The article deals specifically with the position of *historiographe du roi*, a prize official position to which Voltaire was appointed at Versailles from 1745–47. His predecessors in the post included Belleforest, Pellisson, Mézeray, Boileau, Racine and Valincour. This is a post to which Voltaire refers in *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire*, suggesting in disparaging tones that previous incumbents were lax in their duties and merely collected their retainer, rather than actually engage in recording and writing royal history of the moment, which is what Voltaire vows to do.⁴³ However, Voltaire's appointment was undoubtedly made at

⁴¹ Voltaire, "Historiographe", in *Œuvres alphabétiques*, ed. by Jerom Vercruysse, in *OCV*, 33 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1987), pp. 215–220.

⁴² Voltaire, "Historiographe", p. 216.

⁴³ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 185. See also D2135, letter from Voltaire to marquis d'Argenson, 8 January [1740], in Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. Theodore Besterman, in *OCV*, 85–135 (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford, 1968–1977).

the instigation of Mme de Pompadour and lacked the king's support. As Louis XV never felt happy either about Voltaire, or about the position he held, this Royal Historiographer was excluded from crucial royal records and denied access to sensitive documentation. Indeed, he spent much of his life as royal historian on the margins of the court.⁴⁴ Such blatant alienation only made Voltaire even more determined to complete his engagement with flair; for decades afterwards, he doggedly continued to write the contemporary histories begun during his appointment.⁴⁵

Voltaire would later complain sharply about being relieved of his post as *historiographe du roi* while he was resident at the court of Frederick the Great at Potsdam. He feels bitter about this unprecedented dismissal and, in retaliation, underscores the importance of "liberté" for any writer of history. He harks back repeatedly to what he perceives to be English freedom of expression. His complaint merits citation as it reveals much about the pressures attached to the post and to the writing of contemporary history in general: "I don't know why the king deprives me of the post of French Royal Historiographer [...]; it is precisely because I am in a foreign country that I am more suited to being a historian; my work would seem less like a work of flattery; the freedom I enjoy would give greater weight to the truth. [...] to write the history of one's own country, it is necessary to physically remove oneself from that country."⁴⁶ It is perhaps not surprising to note that Voltaire strongly advises Charles Pinot Duclos, his successor in the post of *historiographe du roi*, to take a little trip abroad when writing official history. At this point he refers in a derogatory fashion to history written by anyone who assumes the post of Royal Historiographer as mere *historiograferie*.⁴⁷

In the short article "Historiographe", written two decades after his initial appointment, Voltaire returns to the topic of the difficulties associated with official, commissioned history, and takes great pains to distance the *historiographe* from the *historien*. The *historiographe* is merely defined as a writer who is paid to write official history. Voltaire's tone is utterly

⁴⁴ Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty*, ch. 11.

⁴⁵ Historical writings related to this appointment include Voltaire's poem *La Bataille de Fontenoy* (1745); his *Panegyrique de Louis XV* (1748); and histories *Histoire de la guerre de 1741* (1755) and *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* (1763).

⁴⁶ Voltaire, *Paméla*, ed. Jonathan Mallinson, in *OCV*, 45C (Oxford 2010), lettre 8, 28 octobre 1750, pp. 105–108 (p. 105). It is worth noting that this letter is one of those that comprise the hidden Voltairean novelette *Paméla* and which is therefore considered to have been written long after the events.

⁴⁷ Voltaire, *Paméla*, lettre 8, p. 107.

dismissive. He boldly asserts that it is practically impossible for a royal historian not to be a liar, stating that even a republican historian will not reveal the truth of contemporary political events. Throughout the article, Voltaire insists on reiterating the fact that it is very rare for a royal historian to provide an accurate and precise account of events. For Voltaire, history had to be accurate and analytical. Moreover, Voltaire's own forays into contemporary history show that such texts were spaces ripe for cautious yet practical criticism of the incumbent regime. Therefore, he deliberately lowers the status of this court position, stating that while the *historiographe du roi* will only gather material, collect and write annalistic lists, the true *historien* will utilise the material gathered, will select from it and structure the selected material, and will also write freely and with eloquence. The gulf between the two products is immense, and the *historiographe* is here defined as if the post denotes a mediocre historian, chained to a stifling sort of royal servitude. Perhaps it is not so surprising after all that this article never appeared in the *Encyclopédie*.

II.2 "Histoire" article

Voltaire, like many of the *philosophes*, was engaged in providing multiple articles for the *Encyclopédie* project. The articles allocated to him by Diderot and D'Alembert include letters E–I and he was immensely keen to write "Histoire", which appeared in volume 8 of the *Encyclopédie* in 1765. It is in this key article "Histoire" that Voltaire makes his definitive statement on what history is and thus attempts to influence the thinking reader's understanding of the genre: "History is the narrative of facts taken to be true, in contrast to the fable which is the narrative of facts taken to be false."⁴⁸ In this teasing opposition lies Voltaire's broad and idiosyncratic approach to history. His focus hones in on the word "récit": in Voltairean history the design and style of the narrative, or telling the story of history, arguably takes precedence over the events that are recounted.

At the outset of "Histoire", Voltaire broadens his definition of precisely what constitutes history in his eyes. He defiantly declares that he considers history of art as possibly the most useful history of all, especially where it combines descriptions of progress and inventions with actual details of the mechanics behind them. This reflection is typical of Voltaire's curiosity concerning details of humanity's progress, combined with his love for

⁴⁸ Voltaire, "Histoire", p. 164.

the arts and his belief that cultural and scientific progress must be central to every work of history, regardless of focus.⁴⁹ Another typical observation is the decision to leave religious history to one side, with the author noting pseudo-reverentially that he will not even go near such august and respectable subject matter.⁵⁰

Within the article “Histoire”, Voltaire provides his version of the history of history. He is particularly keen to note that the origins of history lie in storytelling and in fable. In so doing, he pointedly separates inaccurate, fabulous elements within ancient history from his ideal which would be modern, accurate, fact-filled history. Fond as he is of Herodotus, he states that many of the Ancients’ texts are sadly disfigured by the “fabulous” tradition. When it comes to the usefulness of history, Voltaire echoes Machiavelli in maintaining that examples taken from the past will shape the spirit of the attentive prince, hinting that history also provides a *principum specula*: “It is certain that by virtue of revisiting the memory of such quarrels, one prevents them from starting up again.”⁵¹ On the question of certainty and uncertainty in history, Voltaire takes great pleasure in stating that there are no historical certainties, there are only extreme probabilities. He further elucidates his message by reminding readers that some very unlikely situations—such as the story of the man in the iron mask, or the great unspoken secret of state—are entirely true, although the probability of their veracity depends in part on the actual number of alleged witnesses. Equally, anything that goes against nature, regardless of the number of witnesses, is likely to be entirely fictional. Further sections in “Histoire” deal with the problematic nature of monuments and commemorative ceremonies. One passage even warns against medals being considered as reliable historical artefacts. Voltaire muses rhetorically as to whether harangues and character portraits have a place in the work of history, but then roundly condemns their misuse. He evokes one of his favourite maxims from Cicero: the historian dare not speak falsely nor hide the truth. Nonetheless, he is swift to question the latter part of this maxim, suggesting that there is always room for judicious inference, and that it is sometimes prudent to engage in tempering the actual raw truth.

⁴⁹ The obvious example is the chapters reserved exclusively for consideration of government, justice, commerce, finance, arts and sciences in *Siècle de Louis XIV* (chs. 29–34 inclusive).

⁵⁰ In light of his later historical meanderings on religious topics, it would perhaps have been prudent to follow his own advice on this subject.

⁵¹ Voltaire, “Histoire”, p. 223.

Finally, the article concludes with one of Voltaire's favourite topics: the painstaking requirements of modern history, from accuracy to selection of sources and the urgent necessity to convey details other than battles and conquests. "Histoire" declares that well-written history is a rare event. Although the rules are myriad and commonly known, there are few really great historical artists, with one obvious exception, according to himself, *évidemment*.

III. *Historical Practice: An Overview of the Historical Works*

Like his early works of historiography, Voltaire's forays into history in the 1730s were initially tentative and his historical corpus only gradually expanded and gathered momentum. Where his early historiographical vision remains relatively constant from the outset, in the realm of history, Voltaire's historical style, approach and content would mature gradually, with focus and practice constantly under review and each text open to emendation until his death. The historical voice emerges with a certain *élan*, but it would gain in gravitas over time. It is possible to suggest that Voltaire came to write history almost accidentally through research on historical background topics for his poetry and his theatre. Specifically, his very first published attempt at history is the short *Essay upon the civil wars of France* (1727). As this work was intended to provide historical background and publicity for the imminent English readers of his epic poem *La Henriade* (1728), the *Essay* was first published in English during his English "exile" of 1726–8 and only subsequently translated into French. However, since history so permeates Voltaire's world vision, and such was the *philosophe's* interest in politics and *Zeitgeist*, he was surely destined from the outset to attempt to influence the writing of history in his age.

Voltaire's histories reflect his broad vision of a measured march of humankind progressing towards a better world. Unlike many of his contemporaries, his history shows a touching belief that inspired monarchs could, from on high, aid this progress of humanity. An example of this is provided in *La Henriade*, conceived by Voltaire as a national epic poem for France. The epic provides a rose-tinted and highly selective poetic version of Henri IV's ascension to the throne, complete with flights of fancy and saints in heavenly robes. Following hot on the heels of *La Henriade's* success, Voltaire produced a flurry of historical works written in literary style. These early historical works are perhaps still the best known today. Initially, Voltaire wrote substantial histories whose titles bore the

names of monarchs, but that were purposely not monarch-centred. These included histories based on relatively recent monarchs such as Henri IV, Charles XII of Sweden, Louis XIV and Peter the Great of Russia. Thus was Voltairean history launched on the basis of an implicit and deliberate textual self-contradiction whereby there is an intentionally skewed relationship between title and content. For example, *Histoire de Charles XII* deliberately champions the King of Sweden's opponent, Peter the Great of Russia and is ultimately a celebration of the empire-building skills of the Russian czar; the *Siècle de Louis XIV* focuses on a century's *Zeitgeist* rather than on its eponymous figurehead. Throughout these texts, Voltaire writes as a historian, but with literary flair and primarily as an enlightened *philosophe* who is unremittingly determined to challenge the traditional historical construction that was based on dates, battles and monarchs. Brumfitt suggests that Voltaire wrote as a "popularizer rather than a scholar".⁵² Arguably, the final results were not always as radical as Voltaire might have desired, with much of his historical writing still focusing on battles and kings. Nonetheless, his declared aim was to provide a philosophical history for the enlightened reader: "[for] whoever wishes to read history both as a citizen and as a philosopher."⁵³

The early *Histoire de Charles XII* is a very polished literary piece, written in eight neat chapters, with a crisis, resolution or turning point strategically placed at the end of every other chapter. The focus is on the actions and motivations of two great monarchs. The balance between the two is even until the final moment at the battle of Poltava (1709), where the statesmanship of the nation-builder Peter the Great of Russia wins out over the mere military man Charles XII of Sweden. Voltaire's *grand homme* defeats the mere *héros*. The historian's message to monarchs throughout this history is that it is insufficient to win battles, and that great statesmanship and innovatory actions are essential if a monarch is to shine as a true *grand homme* for posterity.

Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* is imbued with a similarly strong message in favour of enlightened monarchy. While ever conscious of the destructive folly of man, the *philosophe* insists on the importance of good leadership to steer humankind through history. It is from this perspective that at the outset of the *Siècle*, Voltaire expounds upon his vision of societal progress. He declares that any discriminating critic will only discern four

⁵² Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*, p. 166.

⁵³ Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 183.

great eras in history to date: Greece under Alexander the Great; Rome under Cesar Augustus; Florence under the Medici; and France under Louis XIV. He qualifies his choice of examples: "These four happy eras were times when the arts were perfected and, because they serve as monuments to the greatness of the human spirit, they stand as examples for posterity."⁵⁴ Thus, a great era necessarily links power with progress and associates the arts with greatness. Voltaire's choices suggest that progress makes great leaps forward wherever exemplary leadership permits. The implication is that ever greater eras will follow in cyclical patterns within the gradual, linear movement of humanity towards a better world. While comprising an inherent criticism of the reign under which he writes, Voltaire thus champions the century of Louis XIV as the pinnacle of all these civilisations to date, not least because it was steered towards greatness by the incumbent monarch. At a moment when endless works were being written on Louis XIV as monarch and warmonger, Voltaire controversially chooses to sideline the great monarch even in the work's title. Instead, he focuses on the history of human spirit during this celebrated era. Indeed, the *Siècle* deliberately deals with progress achieved under the monarch's reign, in direct contrast to the many contemporary hagiographic works written about Louis XIV, or the many annalistic accounts of battles, dates and victories. Even if the first sections are almost entirely devoted to those very military accounts he disdains, ultimately the *Siècle* is a more ambitious work due to its focus on people, economics and society. Voltaire uses a metaphor to describe the work as a tableau rather than a mere work of history: "this is not a work of history, it is the painting of an admirable century."⁵⁵ Up to this point, the eighteenth-century experience of history had not yet included such a work as this with its focus on events, on anecdotes from Louis XIV's reign, on government and law, on the sciences and the arts, and on religious disputes and various religious factions. Moreover, all of this wide-ranging material was contained in one single volume while contemporary historians often wrote twelve.⁵⁶ By breaking with the traditional chronological narrative of history, Voltaire draws the reader's focus to textual elements not usually found in contemporary histories,

⁵⁴ Voltaire, *Siècle*, p. 616.

⁵⁵ Voltaire, *Correspondence*, D895. Letter from Voltaire to Cideville. 30 août [1735].

⁵⁶ For example, Henri-Philippe de Limiers wrote his *Histoire de Suède, sous le règne de Charles XII* (Amsterdam, 1721) in 12 volumes while Isaac de Larrey produced his *Histoire de France sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Rotterdam, 1718) in 4 volumes.

including social, legal and economic reflections. Thus the *Siècle* earns its credentials as the first social history of the époque.

Indubitably, Voltaire's most sweeping and forceful historical work is the universal history, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). This work is conceived as nothing less than a history of humankind. As a text, it stands out as an inspired work that truly reflects the vision of the *philosophes* and that of the Enlightenment in general. It must also be considered as Voltaire's riposte to Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's European and Judeo-Christian vision of world history as expounded in the latter's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681). Voltaire had intended to write the history of humanity and this sweeping survey of history from Charlemagne to Louis XIII is his pre-eminent interpretation of humankind. It is also a secular riposte to the great Bossuet's "world" history. En route through China, India, ancient Rome, England, Arabia, Renaissance Italy and beyond, Voltaire traces the evolution of mores and of laws that inspire human progress. He also cites the *grands hommes* and the *grandes femmes* who improve the world by their guidance of subjects and societies, and who thus aid humankind on its slow path towards progress and greater civilisation, notwithstanding recurrent human litanies of misery and war. As was seen in the *Siècle*, it is primarily great leadership that permits humanity to progress. The *Essai sur les mœurs* is a work-in-progress that Voltaire edits, buffs and shines until his death. Part of its force lies in its brevity, and its concise, yet opinionated, treatment of each topic. It is the chronological prologue to his *Siècle*, but it changes the focus of history, toppling Clio off her traditional European and Judeo-Christian axes and proposing an entirely new paradigm, a precursor to *histoire totale*. As Jacques le Goff writes, Voltaire was one of the fathers of total history, or *l'histoire nouvelle*: "History of structures and not merely events. History in movement, history of evolutions and of transformations, and not static history, history of staged events. Explanatory history and not purely narrative, descriptive, or dogmatic. In short, total history."⁵⁷ According to critic Hervé Martin, Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* is the beginning of total history.⁵⁸ Its perspective is challenging since it proposes a new ground for history with a centre of gravity which was unfamiliar to the early modern reader. As Karen O'Brien has identified, the *Essai sur les mœurs* argues that changes

⁵⁷ Jacques Le Goff, "L'histoire nouvelle", in Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel, eds., *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris, 1978), pp. 210–240 (p. 223).

⁵⁸ Hervé Martin, "L'Histoire érudite de Mabillon à Fustel de Coulanges", in Guy Bourdè and Hervé Martin, *Les écoles historiques* (Paris, 1983), p. 85.

in custom and taste are key indicators of historical development.⁵⁹ The textual weight-shift re-reads historical moments with considerable energy, propelling the reader towards acceptance of modernity through the prism of Enlightenment.

In the light of the aims of the *Essai sur les mœurs*, it initially appears quite unexpected that Voltaire would subsequently undertake to write the commissioned history *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le grand*, since the text abounds in tales of war, albeit with a nod to Voltairean interest in populations, laws, religion, government, justice, economics and progress. Indeed, it is the progress achieved by the energetic and visionary Peter the Great which Voltaire wholly supports. He openly advocates its adoption by any enlightened despot—an aspiration surely destined for his despotic correspondents Frederick the Great and Catherine the Great. Producing the work was laborious, and the final version was heavily censored by the Russian authorities, but Voltaire nonetheless manages to include much of his customary extradiegetic commentaries on topics as diverse as the futility of war, the problem of conflicting sources in history, and criticism of regal war-games and mock-battles as a form of entertainment. Unlike Diderot, Voltaire was too sensitive to the cold ever to travel to Russia so composition was quite protracted and consequently more arduous.

Voltaire's final historical undertakings include the *Annales de l'empire* (1753–4) and the polemical *Histoire du parlement de Paris* (1769). The *Annales* is the uninspiring type of chronological listing of rulers which Voltaire usually abhorred. These annals provide the list of popes and emperors of the Empire since Charlemagne. Voltaire only undertook this work to repay a debt of kindness to the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha after she sheltered him during his dramatic flight from Potsdam when persecuted by Frederick the Great in 1753. Even from Voltaire's quill, these annals seem tedious. However, with a lighter touch, his triumphant general conclusion is that most emperors never saw their 65th birthday and few experienced happiness.

By contrast, the *Histoire du parlement de Paris* is a multi-layered narrative of textual manipulation and deceit, the enjoyment of which is further facilitated by its deciphering in John Renwick's recent critical edition.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 42–43.

⁶⁰ Voltaire, *Histoire du parlement de Paris*, in *OCV*, 68, ed. John Renwick (Oxford, 2005).

In the *Histoire du parlement de Paris*, Voltaire sets out to undermine the foundations on which the *parlements* are built. He goes to extreme lengths to reject the power of *parlement* to decide on how a regency is bestowed; he rejects the suggestion that the *parlements* are the modern avatar of the *états généraux*; finally, he dismisses the assertion that the *robins*, or *parlements'* lawyers, are all of noble origins. Systematically, as if constructing a prosecution case, Voltaire disproves all three assertions. Renwick's magisterial edition reveals many deliberate omissions and selective inclusions, all of which enhance the modern reader's pleasure in Voltaire's powerful speech for the prosecution. The *Histoire du parlement de Paris* is Voltaire's last work of history and the text exhibits the fury felt by the *philosophe* against the *parlements* who were responsible, among a myriad other misdeemeanours, for the torture and death of the chevalier de La Barre who was burned alongside a copy of Voltaire's own *Dictionnaire philosophique*. While Voltaire uniformly emphasises the importance of strong leadership, ideally in the guise of enlightened despotism, his focus here is particularly scathing because of recent travesties of justice executed by various French *parlements*, whose power appeared to remain unchecked. The *robins* who comprise the Parisian *parlement* symbolise a dysfunctional judicial system where rank prejudice leads to legal injustices. Voltaire is incensed.

In his capacity as royal historian to Louis XV (1745–7), Voltaire wrote near-contemporary works of history: *Histoire de la guerre de 1741* (1755); *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* (1763); *Panégryrique de Louis XV* (1748). One might also include the *Poème sur la bataille de Fontenoy* (1745) as it celebrates a jubilant historical moment during Voltaire's posting at Versailles. The *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* presents itself as a complex political assessment of contemporary France and, towards the end, it contains a reflection on one of Voltaire's favourite topics, the progress of the human spirit.

A marked contrast emerges between Voltaire's earlier historical writing and his later works. Where the earlier works are didactic and often proselytising in support of the enlightened individual and the *philosophe's* life-vision, Voltaire's later works are invisibly signed, like his contemporary letters, with his motto *Écraser l'infâme*! Where the earlier works begin with a story-like arc and conclude at a logical point, the later works are primarily driven by a message, often including irate textual outbursts in illustration of a point of injustice or intolerance. The *Écraser l'infâme* campaign was Voltaire's declaration of war on any displays of intolerance, hatred, or fanaticism perpetrated by religious institutions of any kind, with the Roman Catholic Church deemed to be the worst of all offenders. Voltaire not only felt that tolerance should be firmly established, but ideally that

Christianity might come to be based on the teachings of Anglican clergy, and focus on providing moral and social support. For the last few decades of his life, Voltaire was engaged almost exclusively as a campaigner in constant fights against superstition, fanaticism and intolerance and his historical works became yet another weapon in this campaign. Among the works that emerge during this intensive campaigning spell are: *Histoire des rois juifs, et paralipomènes* (1764); *Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises de Pologne* (1767); *Fragments historiques sur l'Inde et sur le général de Lally* (1773–1774); and *Histoire de l'établissement du Christianisme* (1777). These campaign texts will be considered in the study of the activist, or *engagé*, histories below. We turn first to focus on the early histories.

IV. *Enlightened History (pre 1760)*

In Voltaire's initial ventures into history, he wrote philosophical history with the enlightened reader in mind. Without exception, his early histories remain a delight to read: they give preference to brevity over detail, to literary tone over minutiae, and to design over tradition. In an era when length and detail usually took precedence over attention to style, it is a pleasure to discover Voltaire's short and mellifluous historical texts. Markedly absent is the sharp, acerbic voice of the critical pamphleteer, even though the most ostensibly unassuming text is just as riddled with Voltairean propaganda as any virulent pamphlet he may have penned. The literary qualities and the historical methodology of his histories have attracted critical acclaim and censure in equal measure. Where modern critics have been known to gush about his style, Edward Gibbon merely grumbled about Voltaire's faults as a historian.⁶¹

IV.1 *The Hero versus the grand homme*

With *La Henriade*, the young writer was keen to produce a national epic for France. Aspects of the epic reveal Voltaire to be an authentic product of classical Jesuit schooling, grounded in the classics and keen to emulate Homer and Virgil. However, the depiction of Henri IV portrays the image

⁶¹ Brumfitt, p. 14. "Voltaire is a master of narrative prose and his style is unmistakable"; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2010), p. 9. "Gibbon never gave credit to Voltaire for his acute observations, only censure [...] for his faults."

of the perfect Voltairean or Enlightenment historical leader: "Who after long misfortunes learned to govern/Calmed factions, knew both to win and pardon".⁶² True leadership for the enlightenment historian exists only in tandem with good governance and economic savvy, with tenacity in the face of adversity and with an eagerness to shed the shackles of both war and religion when finally in power. As a historian, Voltaire arguably deviates little from this first model when dealing with subsequent royal protagonists in history.

In form and style, Voltaire's early works draw considerable inspiration from the classics. Where the *Iliad* placed Achilles and Hector head-to-head in battle, so *La Henriade* opposes first D'Aumale and Turenne, and then Henri IV and the duc de Mayenne. In didactic mode, the forces of good predictably triumph over those of the less good. In *Histoire de Charles XII*, the text centres on the build-up to the terrible confrontation between Charles XII and Peter the Great.⁶³ Using narrative balancing techniques, a dynamic climax is provided, one that opposes the *héros* and the *grand homme*, where the civilising influence must win the battle. The eponymous Charles XII is merely a warmongering king, whereas Peter the Great is a Voltairean winner because of his progressive innovations, his social reform and his enlightened rule. Where such differing qualities are juxtaposed, enlightenment invariably wins out. In similar fashion, Louis XIV would be championed in *Siècle de Louis XIV* not for his few victories in expensive and cumbersome battles or wars, but rather as a patron of the arts and an avid supporter of science and progress.⁶⁴ Conversely, within Voltaire's *Paméla*, Frederick the Great would be judged and sentenced for crimes against justice.⁶⁵ Voltaire will rank Elizabeth I of England and Catherine the Great of Russia in the highest echelons of the *grandes reines* of history. While not unsuccessful in warmongering, such *reines* are most celebrated for their approach to rule which promotes progress in social and cultural affairs. Thus, in his portraits of rulers in history, the agenda is blatant, monothematic and lacking in apology, subtlety or variation, Voltaire consistently champions the *grand homme/grande femme* over the mere war *héros* in a single-minded attempt to promote those whom he deems to be exemplary, enlightened rulers in history, especially rulers like

⁶² Voltaire, *La Henriade*, ed. by Owen R. Taylor, in *OCV*, 2 (Oxford, 1970), I.1–4.

⁶³ Voltaire, *Charles XII*, pp. 349–350.

⁶⁴ Voltaire memorably lists both his merits and his faults: "not necessarily one of the greatest of men, but one of the greatest kings", *Supplément*, p. 1232.

⁶⁵ Voltaire, *Paméla*, lettre 36, p. 213.

Henri IV who instantly chose country over creed. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, the enlightened end happily and the unenlightened unhappily: that is what history means when written by Voltaire. Even when ostensibly neutral, Voltaire's history is always steeped in its own Enlightenment agenda.

IV.2 *The Anagni Slap*

The succinct nature of Voltaire's history is such that deliberate textual refutations are often particularly significant. It is, for example, remarkable that Voltaire decides to contradict centuries of history by querying the veracity of the episode known as the Anagni slap. This is a notorious and momentous event in 1303 when Philippe-le-bel's invasion of Italy resulted in his French envoy Sciarra Colonna allegedly slapping the face of the trapped Pope Bonifacio VIII in retaliation for the pope's mistreatment of his family. For centuries, historians had referred to this outrage as the Anagni slap. Voltaire's version of the encounter is brief, pared-down and deliberately sceptical: "It is highly unlikely that Colonna was so brutal as to strike him."⁶⁶ Thus Voltaire draws on one of his favourite historiographical criteria, that of *vraisemblance* to reject what had become a symbolic and highly dramatic moment in the history of disputes between state and church, between France and Italy, and between nation and papacy. Complete textual omission of the event by Voltaire would have been impossible because of a pre-existent and deep historical footprint associated with this slap, even among Voltaire's contemporaries.⁶⁷ Equally, even if an actual facial slap did not occur, a metaphorical one certainly did, in that the pope was captured, manhandled, and imprisoned. Moreover, historians had been referring to that slap for centuries and not least in recent decades.⁶⁸ Indeed, Philippe-le-bel's invasion of Italy to capture the pope, a spiritual leader for millions, was generally viewed as a slap across the cheek of the church, as the pope's contemporary and sworn enemy, Dante Alighieri, did not hesitate to highlight in his Divine Comedy.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, I:655.

⁶⁷ For example, Adrien Baillet is quite explicit: "He even dared to slap him across the face with his gauntlet." Adrien Baillet, *Histoire des démêlés du pape Boniface VIII avec Philippe le Bel roi de France* (Paris, 1718, 2e éd.), p. 225.

⁶⁸ Historians Gabriel Daniel, Charles-Jean-François Hénault and François Eudes de Mézeray all give similar versions to Baillet of the Anagni slap.

⁶⁹ Dante was no admirer of Boniface VII, having already denounced Boniface VIII as a simonist, due to spend eternity in Hell, but he nonetheless rushes to his defence due to

His audacious rejection of the slap reflects Voltaire's keen awareness of court etiquette and the protection accorded to leaders by their own people. He knows that it would have been unlikely that Colonna would have got so close to the pope. Much more pertinently, the rejection of the slap reflects Voltaire's anticlericalism as it refuses to afford the reader the luxury of feeling sympathy for the pope, whom the later French historian Michelet would depict as an old man being subjected to indignities.⁷⁰ By airbrushing out the Anagni Slap, Voltaire deliberately attempts to remove all elements of emotion or sympathy typically linked to a religious leader. Instead of religion, he wishes to bring nation-state politics back to top of the agenda at the table of international relations. Voltaire consistently underscored Philippe-le-bel's assertion that temporal power is his, and that the pope is solely responsible for spiritual realms. By eliminating any cause for pity, the pope qua leader remains merely a leader in another state who has no entitlement to power over France and the French people. Such a reading not only rejects theocracy, it also accentuates Voltaire's general anticlericalism as well as his chauvinistic pride in France as a nation. Thus, in Boniface, Voltaire deliberately rejects the image of a pope being assaulted and instead insists on depicting the arrest of a temporal leader who has dared to insult and thwart the very sovereignty of France. To reject the Anagni slap may seem a tiny alteration to history, but it is a symbol of a calculated and principled political stance in the construction of history.

IV.3 *On Truth and Facts in History*

One of Voltaire's more striking hallmarks as a historian is surely his highly unusual *rapport* with the concepts of truth and facts in history. Although Voltaire was quite determined to exclude errors from historical works where possible, he maintained that minor factual errors, or errors of discrete fact, will not detract from the text as an ensemble. Using the analogy of the statue, Voltaire argued that the sculptor may produce a statue that is entirely reflective of the individual, even if each fold is not an exact replica of the original subject. This statue analogy is akin to a work of history that disregards factual errors: "If moreover the body of this work is

the symbolism of the crime. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. 2: *Purgatorio*, ed. John D. Sinclair (Oxford, 1961), p. 268.

⁷⁰ "The old man is threatened and gravely insulted." Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France: Philippe le Bel; Charles V*, ed. Paul Vialleneix and Paule Petitier (Paris, 2008), p. 69.

true, then it is like a statue that is well-constructed, but on which perhaps a fold has been draped in the wrong way."⁷¹ In this way, and in contrast to the rhetoric of his contemporaries, Voltaire openly admits that the historical narrative is a subjective construct.

While subjectivity allows the author to select the elements that comprise his history, it does not preclude the necessity for accuracy, for avoidance of textual portrait painting, for veracity, and for the exclusion of the *invraisemblable* from history. While Voltairean history enjoys its own subjectivity, there is nonetheless a strong awareness of the necessity for proper methodology: this includes consultation of multiple sources, a weighing of opposing accounts, and the statements of enemy witnesses, as well as the avoidance of sources that fail to disclose their own partiality. Yet in practice, Voltaire was only too aware of the unreliable nature of certain sources, as he notes regretfully: "Since I started working on history, I never cease to be indignant about the groundless accusations with which historians choose to darken their work."⁷² Nonetheless, sources and witness accounts are essential for piecing together the jigsaw, especially in improbable cases, such as the story of the man in the iron mask. Interestingly, Voltaire believed in this tale, however fantastic it may seem, partly because of a multitude of witnesses: "the sheer number of witnesses confirms the tale, including accounts by those old men who heard it being spoken of in ministries, making it even more authentic for us."⁷³ Other historians' accounts are regularly deemed to be unreliable, as are eyewitness accounts, travel writers and chroniclers. This judgement leads Voltaire, a pyrrhonist, to acknowledge that it is difficult for any historian to attempt to establish historical facts with any degree of absolute certainty.

Voltaire is keen, moreover, to emphasise that inclusion of all related facts is not the main cornerstone of the historical composition. By introducing the analogy of the shopping basket, he suggests that because the historian carries the basket around, he has total freedom over the inclusion or exclusion of certain topics or elements from that basket: "In all these immense collections that can never be fully taken on board, it is necessary to limit oneself and to choose. It is a great store where one must take only that which is of use."⁷⁴ The sheer enormity of contemporary

⁷¹ Voltaire, *Supplément*, p. 1237.

⁷² Voltaire, *Dissertation de la mort de Henri IV*, in *La Henriade*, ed. Owen R. Taylor, in *OCV*, 2 (Oxford, 1970), pp. 339–46 (p. 340).

⁷³ Voltaire, *Supplément*, pp. 1241–2.

⁷⁴ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, I:196.

annals, of chronicles and of multi-volume histories meant that historians who admired brevity needed to omit more than they could include. Brevity was to become the hallmark of Voltairean historiography. His insistence on selectivity in the composition of a work of history removes his text from the realm of contemporary expectations and constraints and effectively redesigns the very shape of history for the future.

Allowing that elements could be selected, included or excluded, is an open admission that there is not just one narrative in existence in relation to any one historical moment: "I think one must despair of ever quite knowing all the exact details."⁷⁵ If historical facts may be selected, then the historical narrative may be freed up for all sorts of inclusions, such as discussions of historiography, narrative commentaries, or textual digressions. It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which Voltaire's scepticism regarding the possibility of ever recording absolute truth in history conveniently released the historian from all sorts of contemporary constraints whenever it suited him. Ultimately, the historian would find that the historical narrative had extensive space to permit active campaigning from within the text itself. Subsequently, the campaign might even comprise the text as will be seen in Voltaire's *engagé* history.

V. *Engagé* history: critical activism in the later works

In his later years, Voltaire undertook to defend innocent victims in a number of judicial affairs and became known as a campaigner for justice. Many of those victims were exonerated thanks to Voltaire's involvement. He was successful in clearing the names of unjustly condemned individuals including Calas, Sirven, Lally, La Barre, Montbailly and Martin.⁷⁶ The cases of Calas and Lally will be examined below. The fact that such cases also became a part of works of history is not, of course, by chance. Firstly,

⁷⁵ Voltaire, *Correspondence*, D2593. Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*, c.15 February 1742.

⁷⁶ Sirven's daughter was enclosed in a convent but went mad and threw herself into a well. Her Protestant parents were blamed, forcing the family to flee. Voltaire cleared their name. The young La Barre was condemned for "impiétés" [acts of impiety], had his tongue cut off, was decapitated and then burnt along with a copy of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764). Montbailly was proven innocent of murder after his death. Martin was wrongly accused of highway robbery on the sole evidence of some stolen clothes. The true robber confessed to the crime soon after Martin was tortured and broken on the rack. For precise biographical details of Voltaire's involvement in these and similar campaigns, see « *Écraser l'infâme* », in *Voltaire en son temps*, vol. 4.

Voltaire opened up the narrative space of history to invite all sorts of extradiegetic material including commentary, digression and contemporary example. Voltaire believed in the inexorable movement of humanity through history and towards progress, while nonetheless recognising that the process of advancement is painstakingly slow: "We see [...] how difficult it is to do great things and that it is necessary not only to be tirelessly insistent, but also to have several generations imbued with that same obduracy."⁷⁷ Within his works of history, Voltaire dares to highlight the enlightened state of non-biblical peoples. Certainly he was not shy of drawing evident links between historical and recent political events. He clearly believes in the didactic purpose of history: "It is through the history of our own follies that one learns to be wise."⁷⁸ Therefore it would seem entirely logical that contemporary events would find their parallel in events past and thus themselves come to be recounted in a work of history.

V.1 *The Case of Jean Calas*

One of the key histories of the later period of Voltaire's life deals with events that had only just recently occurred in the early 1760s, and were still in the course of being resolved. However, Voltaire wished to put these momentous events on record as worthy of a place in future history and he published the work as *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning et des Calas* (1762). Voltaire's adoption of the Calas affair as a campaign is well documented, as is his perseverance until the posthumous rehabilitation of Jean Calas was achieved. Calas was tried, condemned to death at a closed sitting of the Dijon *parlement* and executed the next day for his alleged involvement in the death of his son Marc-Antoine. On specious grounds, it was deemed that the Huguenot Calas killed his son for the latter's expression of interest in Catholicism. The law court, the *parlement*, had no evidence for this. Being so well-connected, Voltaire managed to use correspondence, a network of intermediaries, and his contacts in high places to influence public opinion in defence of the Calas family. On behalf of Calas's widow and son he wrote pamphlets to be circulated widely in Paris and across Europe, and he published the emotional *Traité sur la tolérance à l'occasion de la mort de Jean Calas* (1763). Voltaire was highly critical of French methods

⁷⁷ Voltaire, "Histoire", p. 169.

⁷⁸ Voltaire, *Conclusion et examen de ce tableau historique*, in Moland, vol. 24, pp. 473–82 (p. 477).

of prosecution, and thus in the *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning et des Calas* the historian didactically appends the parallel story of Elisabeth Canning to the Calas affair as an example of a better judicial system. The English girl Canning vanished for a month and reappeared with an invented story of enforced prostitution, for which one man would be sentenced to death. Canning's story was soon proven false and the condemned man was freed by the English courts. Voltaire is swift to emphasise the importance of due process and suggests that the French *parlements* needed to avoid miscarriages of justice by enforcing mandatory delays between sentencing and execution. Thus while championing Calas personally (and later, the Protestant Sirven in a similar miscarriage of justice based on religious prejudice),⁷⁹ Voltaire simultaneously addresses issues of fanaticism, religious intolerance and the problematic nature of the unjust judicial system in place in late-eighteenth-century France.

From Calas onwards, Voltaire would henceforth sign all of his correspondence with the rallying cry, *Écraser l'infâme!*, often shortened to *Écr. l'inf.* The crossover between historical works and political engagement may have been highlighted by the Calas affair, but gradually much of Voltaire's historical writing becomes assimilated into his subsequent ongoing campaigns against fanaticism, intolerance and superstition. The tone here is remarkably different from that of his earlier works. Indeed, his determination to redesign History as a record of humankind and its motivations, as seen in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, combined with his emboldened campaigning voice, will ultimately fuse to shape texts that become practically unrecognisable as compared to the relatively mild historical works of his youth.

It is noteworthy that Voltaire openly purported to view and comment on religion in history from a solely political rather than a religious perspective. Biblical criticism was an intellectual hobby shared by both Mme Du Châtelet and Voltaire during their studious sojourns at the Châtelet château in Cirey. In the footsteps of Bayle, Voltaire claimed that the Bible contains innumerable unfounded claims that crumple if surveyed by the sceptical eye. This was a topic that yielded up much material over the years and Voltaire was never one to waste good research, nor did he hesitate to recycle, or even to cut and paste. Indeed, he came back to the topic of biblical criticism in the last year of his life to dictate his eclectic,

⁷⁹ In defence of Sirven, Voltaire would publish the *Avis au public sur les parricides* (1766).

satirical history entitled *Histoire de l'établissement du christianisme* (1777). The text presents Christianity in a none-too-perfect light, consistent with the tone of most of his other later works where he advocates tolerance in place of religious fanaticism.

V.2 *The Case of General Lally*

Voltaire's last major "campaign" was one that would permeate the history *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, and which even triggered an entire historical work of its own, *Fragments sur l'Inde et sur le général Lalli* (1773).⁸⁰ While Voltaire spent much energy campaigning against infamy, this was often in the light of injustices related to religion, whether social, political or judicial. The difference with the Lally case was that religious persecution was not the trigger in this miscarriage of justice. General Thomas Arthur Lally was executed for treason and for his alleged guilt as the sole person responsible for the French defeat against the English at Pondicherry. That Lally could be sentenced to death for treason without any legal proof ever being found or produced was shocking. Naturally, Voltaire was keen to champion any victim of French jurisprudence but Lally's was a clear case of judicial misdemeanour that horrified the campaigner.

Voltaire had met Lally several decades earlier and was struck by the young soldier's attachment to the Jacobite cause. As he was of Irish extraction, it was not surprising that General Lally was a passionate supporter of the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart. In 1745, while Voltaire was *historiographe du roi*, he personally got to know the fiery Lally who was campaigning at that time to persuade the French to support Stuart militarily. This contact led Voltaire to realise immediately that Lally would never have betrayed France in favour of England, or have sold Pondicherry to the English, whom he regarded as mortal enemies. Voltaire readily acknowledged that Lally was no angel, referring to him in his correspondence as "a devilish hotheaded Irishman."⁸¹ Even taking into account Lally's fiery temper and unruly nature, without any hard, legal evidence, it was indefensible that there should be such a blatant official decision to turn Lally into a public scapegoat. Voltaire defended Lally in

⁸⁰ In the recent critical edition of the *Fragments*, Lally's story is eloquently reconstituted by Cynthia Manley in Voltaire, *Fragments sur l'Inde et sur le général Lalli*, ed. by Cynthia Manley and John Renwick, in *OCV*, 75B (Oxford, 2009), pp. 5–43.

⁸¹ Voltaire, *Correspondence*, D8757. Letter from Voltaire to Conte d'Argental. 15 février [1760].

a relatively impartial fashion in the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, but he wrote an impassioned defence of Lally in his *Fragments sur l'Inde* which he drafted in support of the campaign by Lally's illegitimate son to get his father exonerated. This case is all the more famous as it is the topic of one of Voltaire's final letters in which, a mere four days before his own death, he celebrates the fact that the verdict of 1766 against Lally has been set aside by the *Conseil d'État*, with the king's authority. The tenor of Voltaire's celebratory words reinforced the celebrity attached to the Lally case: "The dying man revives on learning this wondrous good news; he embraces M. de Lally with tenderness; he sees that the king is indeed the defender of Justice; he will die happy."⁸²

Conclusion

Voltaire's historiographical and historical writings are unmistakably those of the *philosophe* himself, saturated as they are by his world vision, and sprinkled with his own brand of propaganda and his later campaigns for justice. While Voltaire is more immediately associated in the modern reader's mind with philosophical tales like *Candide* or his *Écraser l'infâme* campaigns, his lifelong commitment to historiography and history has bequeathed a very substantial and interesting, if far from perfect, body of work. Voltaire's anxiety to shape his profile for posterity, and to reserve a prominent position for himself among the *grands hommes*, actually contributed to a phenomenally prolific historiographical and historical output. There was never any question of a mere parterre seat for the historian Voltaire.

René Pomeau suggests that Voltaire never developed a concrete political ideology, but wrote instead according to an inspired ideal.⁸³ Some might argue that Voltaire never developed a concrete historiographical system either, but that the same inspired ideal nonetheless permeates his historiographical writings. Voltaire certainly had a strong vision of how history should be written, which led him to devise a new set of historiographical foundation stones: the text must be accurate and *vraisemblable*; the historian benefits from hindsight; history demands accurate sources; the historian must filter and synthesise when constructing a narrative; the

⁸² Voltaire, *Correspondence*, D21213. Letter from Voltaire to Lally-Tolendal. 26 mai [1778].

⁸³ René Pomeau, *Politique de Voltaire* (Paris, 1963), p. 8.

historian should not allow bias to permeate the text; history demands brief analysis and never mere compilation of facts. The confident historiographer also brings theoretical questions of truth and sources to the table: errors of discrete fact must be corrected, but small errors are considered unimportant within the larger work of history as a whole. In historical terms, this pyrrhonic scepticism, or the belief that certain knowledge is impossible to obtain, frees up the historical text from the worry of attempting to provide absolute truth within history. Such scepticism allows Voltaire to expand the textual space of history so that it includes a social and philosophical focus that embraces everything from economics to demographics via laws, religion, government, justice and commerce, all filtered through an enlightenment prism and with the aim of replicating the progressive spirit of humankind. Although not as prescriptive on the topic as Condorcet, Voltaire believed that history reflected the progress of mankind and Voltaire historian was ever keen to write philosophical history for an enlightened, progressive reader.⁸⁴

As with his immense corpus as a whole, it is possible to discern distinct phases in Voltaire's historical writing. The young historian attempts to establish a *modus operandi* by distinguishing himself from contemporary historians and by defining his historiography largely in opposition to contemporary practice, or indeed malpractice as he prefers to underscore. His earliest works, however tentative in execution, thus signal a keen determination to pursue a rigorous historiographical methodology and to reject shoddy practices. Voltaire excels in his intended story arc, and his literary texts are appealing, predominantly positive pieces, easily read by posterity, regardless of any inaccuracies or anachronisms contained therein. Voltaire historian prefers to focus on the championing of civilisation and of progress, rather than solely on a leader's prowess on the battlefield. The *philosophe* was unusual among his peers in seeking out enlightened examples of good rulers, very much in the tradition of *principum specula*, in order to better illustrate the history of the progress of mankind; his continuing trust in enlightened despots to guide humankind is also apparent in Voltaire's decades-long correspondence with Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia. His peculiar trust in enlightened despots presents them as a key element for a successful society because in the absence of great or influential leadership, humanity can present

⁸⁴ Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit humain* (Paris, 1794).

a frustratingly bleak tableau: "the never-ending examples of injustice, of cruelty, of murder, of banditry with which the history of nearly all nations is littered."⁸⁵ Nor does Voltaire expect immediate results, as is apparent from his image of cyclical peaks of civilisation as sketched in the *Siècle*. These peaks suggest a relatively optimistic image of a two-steps-forward, one-step-back process. Ultimately humankind is a work-in-progress for Voltaire historian: "many centuries are required for human society to perfect itself."⁸⁶ As an ensemble, the early histories stand as testament to his belief in the didactic powers of the historical story; they also provide a certain lesson in politics. The budding historian soon reshapes history into a new form of universal history in the *Essai sur les mœurs*. In so doing, he challenges the perception of Europe as the epicentre of mankind and confronts traditional, unswerving attachment to battles, dates and monarchs in history. Moreover, he designs a philosophical history that focuses on recording the gradual progress of mankind towards greater civilisation.

From within the narrative of the established historian emanates the voice of the embattled campaigner, a man who is driven in the name of justice and who writes mainly for this cause. This is the historian who can burst into textual outbursts of rage and incomprehension in texts that often barely disguise their propagandistic currency. As the attacks and the satire continue to mount, sometimes the work of history risks critical implosion. Nonetheless, all of Voltaire's historical texts are persuasive, each bringing a breadth of reading and scepticism to a vast range of topics. Where nowadays historiography and history are considered the jealously-guarded preserve of the historian or the historical biographer, Voltaire tolerated no such artificial and restrictive boundaries.

Voltaire's voluminous historical and historiographical corpora bear the hallmark of a committed and reflective historian, and are patently the writings of an engaged, politically-conscious writer. His histories also barely disguise the witty tones of the ironic and sometimes caustic social critic and the acerbic *philosophe*. It was to Voltaire's advantage that his financial situation in exile would permit him to write with much greater freedom than if he had remained in life-long financial or moral thrall to the court at Versailles. This liberty undoubtedly facilitated his creation of a new vision of history and he is variously celebrated as the architect of the universal history, as the originator of social history, as the creator

⁸⁵ Voltaire, *Fragment sur l'histoire générale*, in Moland, vol. 29, pp. 223–83 (p. 241).

⁸⁶ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, II:399.

of *histoire nouvelle*, and as the father of *histoire totale*.⁸⁷ His determination to transform and rethink the use of the historical textual space is firmly established and his influence in this regard is considerable in a number of diverse fields.⁸⁸ Karen O'Brien furthermore affirms that above all else, "Voltaire projected himself as the final signified of his own works".⁸⁹ Arguably, the appeal of his vast historical corpus will depend not just on readers' casual reaction to the inimitable flourish of that Voltairean quill, but especially upon ongoing critical assessments of its political and historiographical insights against the wider backdrop of Enlightenment historiography.

⁸⁷ Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*, p. 165; Le Goff, "L'histoire nouvelle", pp. 223–4.

⁸⁸ Rosenthal argues strongly that Voltaire's philosophy of history inspired nineteenth-century ethnology. Rosenthal, "Voltaire's Philosophy of History", p. 178.

⁸⁹ O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 55.

6. HERDER IN 1774: AN INCOMPLETE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Bertrand Binoche

There are two good reasons to return to the famous work published by Herder in 1774 under the provocative title of *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit. Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts*. Here is the first: in this text one finds an attempt to come to terms, no doubt for the first time, with that then-new object that we call today “the philosophy of history.” All of the French, German, or Scottish attempts at this subject since the 1750’s find themselves swallowed up here in a whirlwind of virulent and dizzying critique that makes evident the real stakes involved. We find ourselves as if before a prism that refracts the diverse modalities in which the European Enlightenment seized hold of history in order to subject it to the constraints of what they called “reason.” Refracted—this means at the same time deformed and revealed, revealed through deformation: polemic, by the very gesture of denunciation that it implies, both caricaturizes its adversary and unveils some aspect of what the adversary actually is. Polemic falsifies and illuminates. Inseparably, again, it suggests an alternative, a counter position to the one it rejects, and it designates this in its very title: “another philosophy of history.” But to suggest is not to affirm; it is even less to define. What precisely is being proposed? What sort of philosophy, and the philosophy of what sort of history?

The most common response to these questions is the second reason that it is instructive to reread Herder: the other philosophy of history that is introduced here is, it is often said, “historicism.” By this term we are to understand three related theses: (1) *everything* that is real is historical, and, therefore, everything that claims to be extra-historical cannot be anything other than fiction (natural law, for example); (2) one must apprehend this historical reality in its *individuality*, by adequate procedures elaborated specifically for this purpose and distinct from those that one finds in natural philosophy; (3) we must admit the inescapably *relative* character of that which presents itself to us under the form of a no less irreducible plurality, and we cannot order this plurality hierarchically in reference to an undiscoverable transcendence.

Herder has often been considered the founding father of this second point of view—the conqueror of a new world, the one who would deliver historical knowledge from the paradigms that had rendered it impossible. Already in 1901, Dilthey concluded a long study on the discovery of history by the philosophers of the Enlightenment by explaining that it is only in Germany that one could attain “the inner comprehension of spiritual history” (*das innerliche Verständnis der geistigen Geschichte*) and that it is only with Herder that the crisis was fully realized: “*In Herder vollzog sich die Krisis.*”¹ In 1932, Cassirer completed the 5th chapter of his *Philosophie der Aufklärung* with the praise of the 1774 book, which accomplished a “decisive step” in breaking with traditional analysis and in elaborating a method that focuses on every historical individuality.² In 1936, Meinecke accorded to the same work the merit of having made Herder “the path-breaker of historicism.”³ One must, no doubt, await 1967 to see Gadamer break from this perspective and refuse to see in this text “the disconcerting face of an anticipation of the historicism of 1900” though he does nonetheless credit Herder with having nourished subsequent romanticism.⁴ In 1994, Ernst Behler would pursue this line of inquiry in order to show how Herder elaborated—the formula is judicious—a “fragmentary knowledge of history” that attempts to articulate the question of what it means to the new modern consciousness to be “modern.”⁵ But the question of historicism always returns, as if, in this year 1774, the emerging philosophies of history were already on the verge of tipping over into something else altogether, a complete apologia for history that would pay for the authentic understanding of singular human realities with the irremediable destruction of all norms capable of ordering their now hopeless diversity.

Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte thus appears at the same time as a kaleidoscope and a beginning. The question we would like to pose here is just what exactly it reveals, and whether it truly inaugurates something. We seek to identify the nature of this discourse that is so difficult to label and that owes, no doubt, to this indefinable nature its persistent fascina-

¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, “Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und das geschichtliche Welt,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 108 (1901), 363 & 380.

² Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln et James P. Pettigrove (Boston, 1955), pp. 230–231.

³ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich, 1965), p. 358.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften*, 4 vols. (Tübingen, 1967–1979), 3:104 & 116.

⁵ Ernst Behler, “Historismus und Modernitätsbewußtsein in Herders Schrift *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*,” *Études germaniques* 49/3 (1994), 267–284.

tion: its richness derives perhaps more than anything from its ambiguities. Finally, we wish to demonstrate that it occupies a singular space in the European Enlightenment.⁶

1. *An Alternative?*

If we want to understand the title of the work,⁷ we must recall several elementary truths, and first of all the extremely overdetermined character of the phrase “philosophy of history.” When Voltaire proposed this terminology in 1765, he expressed, at base, an imperative: we must write history philosophically, that is, in sweeping away fables and events that are without interest in the aim of caring for the human race, whose happiness here below is the only true end. In other words, one must satisfy three demands: truth, utility, and impartiality. Now, one may engage in this without introducing into history a finality, without conferring on it a meaning that is the monopoly of the philosopher, as can be seen in exemplary fashion in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, which describes, in the opinion of its author, “a chaos of events, of factions, of revolutions and of crimes.”⁸

Under such a general perspective one can understand many different things: in one sense, all of the philosophers in the period seek to write history. But, for example, when Jacob Wegelin published his considerations “On the Philosophy of History” in the *Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie de Berlin* from 1772 to 1776, it was not in the least to recount a universal history, but to prescribe the manner in which it ought to be recounted—that is to say, to formulate the rules by asking questions such as ‘what is a fact,’ ‘what is an event,’ and ‘what forces, dead or alive, do man and society obey?’ When Isaak Iselin, on the other hand, affirmed in 1764 the necessity of associating philosophy and history,⁹ it was in the service of a discourse

⁶ References here are to the Suphan edition of the *Sämtliche Werke*, 33 vols. (Berlin, 1877–1913), 5: 477–586, and to the edition of Hans-Dietrich Irmscher (Stuttgart, 2007).

⁷ About which one can find a brilliant commentary in Jürgen Brummach, “Herders Polemik gegen die Aufklärung” in *Aufklärung und Gegenauflklärung in die europäischen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Darmstadt, 1989), pp. 282–284.

⁸ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963), 2:905.

⁹ See *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, bk. II, chp. 1. The place of man in nature raises “wichtige Fragen, welche zu beantworten wir die *Geschichte* sowohl als die *Philosophie* zu Hilfe nehmen müssen. Diese ist immer sehr schwach, wenn sie nicht von jener unterstützt ist, und jene ist meistens unnütz, und oft schädlich, wenn sie nicht von dieser erleuchtet wird”, 2 vols. (Zürich, 1770) 1:148.

that ordered universal history teleologically, from the savage to the merchant in the European north, *via* the slave of the oriental despot and the ancient citizen in the Mediterranean, according to a division that Hegel would still follow. In short, “the philosophy of history” was employed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment as a phrase meaning *the epistemological insufficiency of history alone*, understood as a simple list of facts (annals) or as dynastic and military histories that leave aside entirely that which makes the modern age—*le commerce* (in the two senses of the French word: social customs and trade), the arts and the sciences, law, and the decline of superstitions. The philosopher must take charge of the writing of history in order to determine how to establish the facts, which ones to retain, and how to arrange them in a discursive manner. That which we call today “the philosophy of history,” these historicizations of theodicy¹⁰, these impressive narratives of the human world as *becoming* the best of all possible worlds, is thus but one of the possible responses to the question “how should one compose universal history philosophically?” One could call this without exaggeration *Iselin’s answer*.¹¹ And it is only if we forget that this is but one of the conceivable options that we can interpret “the philosophy of history” (in general) as the secularization of “the theology of history” (in general).¹²

When Herder declares in 1774 that he is “also” producing a philosophy of history, and adding a contribution to “the many contributions of our century,” he brings our attention to a very recent proliferation of work in which he intends to participate. But we need to understand how he configures these efforts, that is to say how he reconstructs his adversaries in order to position himself polemically. Who precisely, in his view, says what?

Who? The interlocutors are named explicitly. They are numerous and they are European: Voltaire and Hume, first of all,¹³ but also Montesquieu, d’Alembert and Boulanger; Iselin, Winckelmann and the historians of

¹⁰ See Odo Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), part. 1.

¹¹ In his remarkable postface, Hans Dietrich Irmscher correctly underlines the importance of Iselin for Herder and reminds us that Herder himself speaks of a “theodicy a posteriori” in a sketch for the essay on *Shakespeare* (see pp. 140, 143, 145 and 156–158).

¹² Karl Löwith, *Meaning and History* (Chicago, 1949). Bertrand Binoche, *La raison sans l’Histoire* (Paris, 2007), pp. 351–362.

¹³ As is noted by Max Rouché in his irreplaceable study, *La philosophie de l’histoire de Herder* (Thouars, 1940), p. 156.

Göttingen; Robertson and Millar... this *enumeration*¹⁴ is the procedure by which they find themselves amalgamated: "All the books of our *Voltaire* and *Hume*, *Robertson's* and *Iselin's* are full of this..." (*Davon sind alle Bücher unsrer Voltäre und Hume, Robertsons und Iselins voll* [...]) (p. 524/49);¹⁵ this diversity is hereby reduced to a kind of spectre whose dominant identity is always French, and even Parisian: "One could still allow the *disseminators* of the *medium* of this formation the language and the delusion that they form 'humanity,' and of course, especially the philosophers of Paris the language and the delusion that the form *toute l'Europe* and *tout l'univers*." (*Den Verbreitern des Mediums dieser Bildung könnte man immer die Sprache und den Wahn lassen, als sie "die Menschheit" und insonderheit ja den Philosophen von Paris, daß sie toute l'Europe et tout l'univers bilden* [...]).¹⁶ To fight against the philosophy of history is to fight against French cultural hegemony and the atheism of which it is the vehicle; it is thus also to fight against the German elites insofar as they are 'Frenchified'. David against Goliath or a repeat of Luther against Rome: a superintending Lutheran officiant in the miniscule county of Schaumburg-Lippe—created in 1647 with an area of a mere 340 km² and with a population, in 1766, of 17,000 inhabitants—against Berlin and Frederick II.¹⁷

Who says what? We have guessed: the Paris of the 'philosophes' is the place where the universal is announced and from which one may evaluate all past cultures with a comfortable haughtiness, mocking their vulgarity and their superstitions. This pretended philosophy of history is the arrogance of a simple point of view that believes itself to be the point of arrival; it is the disdain for other nations and the rejection of Christianity. This insufferable fatuity apprehends history under two forms that are the inverse of one another (pp. 511–512/36–37). The first is sceptical: rejecting Christianity, it rejects any form of providence and opposes our enlightened present to a shapeless past, a Voltairean chaos: "[...] the most recent

¹⁴ Jürgen Brummach, "Herders Polemik gegen die Aufklärung", p. 284.

¹⁵ Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, tr. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: 2002), 307. [All English translations will be from this volume, hereafter cited in the text as *PW*. Given the complex and playful nature of Herder's writing, we have opted to retain the German alongside the translation within the text.—Translator.]

¹⁶ P. 541/66; *PW* 321–2. See also, p. 546/71; *PW* 325: "Where is what *Voltaire* writes not read!, Already almost the whole earth shines with *Voltaire's* clarity!" (*wo wird nicht, was Voltäre schreibt, gelesen? Die ganze Erde leuchtet beinahe schon von Voltärs Klarheit!*).

¹⁷ See M. Rouché, *La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, pp. 64 et 78. I thank Philippe Büttgen for having drawn my attention to the nature of Schaumburg-Lippe in 1774 at a conference given at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, 3 November, 2009.

fashionable tone of the most recent, in particular *French, philosophers*¹⁸ is doubt!" ([...] *der neueste Modeton der neuesten, insonderheit französischen Philosophen, ist Zweifel!*) The second is dogmatic: in place of Christian finality, it opposes another type of finality, one that conceives of itself as rational in virtue of which our Enlightenment philosophy is the culminating point of a steady progress. On the one hand (Voltaire) we have the massive and undifferentiated devaluation of that from which we have torn ourselves by means of who-knows-what miracle; on the other—more the position of Iselin—we have the romance of a general amelioration that forcibly falsifies history, only retaining the facts that can be inscribed in the narrative thread that one assigns to it a posteriori.

But then what does the *auch* in Herder's title signify? Without doubt it indicates, first, a *parody*, and from this point of view one must understand it to say "*Noch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*."¹⁹ One more, as if there were not enough already! This redundancy is reproduced in the subtitle, "Contribution to many other contributions of the century." And beyond this title, we have here a thoroughgoing rhetorical strategy: Herder neutralizes the adversary by repeating his discourse in a mocking form; in principle, the quotation marks are there to indicate that he does not support these theses,²⁰ but in fact it is sometimes very difficult to know who exactly is speaking, Herder himself or the person that he is mocking.²¹ In a letter to Johann Gottfried Eichhorn from the 3rd of October, 1783, the author himself designated his book a "pamphlet [Pamphlet]"²² and, indeed, one might think that that enterprise exhausts itself in this ironic redoubling. This would permit us to escape a great number of difficulties: at base, it would become entirely hopeless to want to identify the Herderian philosophy of history in 1774 for the very good reason that there

¹⁸ Herder cites in a note, Montaigne, Bayle, Voltaire, Hume, Diderot—from which we might conclude that Hume is, at base, a little bit French . . .

¹⁹ In French, M. Rouché gives this translation: *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire*. In English we have *Yet another Philosophy of History* (trad. Frederick M. Barnard, Cambridge, 1969); *This too a Philosophy of History* (in *Philosophical Writings*, trad. Michael N. Forster, Cambridge, 2002); and finally *Another Philosophy of History* (trad. Ionnis D. Evrigenis et Daniel Pellerin, Indianapolis, 2004).

²⁰ See, for example, p. 545/70 or the last lines of the second section.

²¹ See, for example, p. 546/70–71: without doubt Herder makes his adversaries speak here without using quotation marks, but that does not mean that he does assume responsibility for anything in this treatise; it is true that our century is "a means and an end," just as it is true that the philosophers of the Enlightenment are winning over the entire world.

²² Cited by Dietrich Irmscher, "Gegenwartskritik und Zukunftsbild in Herders Schrift *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*", in *Recherches Germaniques* 23 (1993), p. 33.

would not be one. We would thus simply have before us—which would, in any case, not be so bad—a pure staging of “the” Enlightenment philosophy of history, and we would have to give the last word to sarcasm.

It is, however, impossible to leave things there. In 1773, Herder declared proudly of his then newly completed book that it exposed “my philosophy of history [meine *Philosophie der Geschichte*].”²³ In the title of the work we must, then, also read “Eine *andere* Philosophie der Geschichte.” The purpose of the parodist repetition is to make an *alternative* appear: the point is to reveal a philosophy of history that is not like the others. But in what is it different? Might it not be that it is less a philosophy than a *theology* of history? Note, indeed, that in place of the natural origin of the American savage Herder substitutes that of the Old Testament patriarchs, and instead of the final happiness of the human race he opposes the face-to-face of the *Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*.²⁴ It is equally true that this history, in fact, is not at all universal because its orthodoxy is restricted to the Christian world—it is useless to look for China or the new world here; given this, the express critique of Bossuet (p. 552/77) needs to be taken with a grain of salt.²⁵ It is also true that great men, Luther included, see their initiatives minimized at the expense of Providence—man is never anything but an instrument.²⁶ Indeed, it is certain that even the writing of Herder, as disconcerting as it was for his contemporaries, is clarified if we recognize in it the style of a predication:²⁷ because his purpose is less to demonstrate than to persuade an interlocutor in a manner appealing to sensibility (and not purely rationality), Herder deploys a prose that is at once dialogical (speech given to the adversary and its refutations), metaphorical (to which we will return), elliptic (it makes the reader think), and

²³ Cited in the edition of Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke in zehn Bänden*, 11 vols. (Frankfurt sur le Main, 1985–2000), 4:818.

²⁴ As Wulf Koepke writes, “Religion is thus the beginning and the end of this philosophy of history,” *Johann Gottfried Herder* (Boston, 1987), p. 35. It is this apocalyptic overture that leads Susan Pickford to argue that the end of the work is not an end at all: “Does the end of Herder’s *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* represent a conclusion?” in *German Life and Letters*, Oxford, 58/3 (2005), pp. 235–246.

²⁵ Max Rouché, *La philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, p. 97, makes of Herder “le Bossuet de l’Allemagne protestante.” Roy Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang* (Manchester, 1953), p. 220, remarks as well that the peoples figuring in Herder’s book are the very same ones that appear in Bossuet’s: Hebrews, Egyptians, Phoenecians, Greeks and Christians.

²⁶ See, for example, 532/57 & 558/83.

²⁷ For contemporary reactions, see S. Pickford, “Does the End . . .”, pp. 237–239. On style, see the excellent study of Hans Adler, “Herder’s style,” ed. Hans Adler et Wulf Koepke, *A Companion to the Works of J.G. Herder* (Rochester & New York, 2009), pp. 331–350.

tonal (the punctuation and the *Sperrdruck* accentuate the discourse and give it a texture in the aim of capturing the reader's attention).

But this too is not enough. This is a strange theology of history that, if it opposes itself to Voltaire, also sets itself apart from Voltaire's German translator, Johann Jakob Harder, who effectuated a true theological critique resting on revelation. Herder offers a theology of history that says nothing about original sin and that does not privilege any chosen people. It is one that does not get its authority from the sacred text, but that, on the contrary, justifies the historical moments that it reports with a logic that is purely internal: that which the Phoenicians or the Romans said can be understood, and can only be understood, by a process in which they could not occupy another place.²⁸ Finally, and most importantly, it is one that abolishes the great dualism of sacred vs. profane history and deploys itself *in a time that is perfectly homogenous*, in which sacred and profane are inseparable. No, we are indeed dealing here with another *philosophy* of history, one in which the diverse Biblical reminiscences do not constitute the essential plot. This text is a singular *hybridization* that brings together what the *Encyclopédie* had so carefully dissociated: reason, memory and imagination, or philosophy, history and poetry.²⁹ But again, to what end does he proceed in this manner? To what end is this interlacing of distinct arguments? Where does Herder want to go in his text that runs the risk of becoming indecipherable?

The purpose is stated explicitly in the title: it is the *Bildung der Menschheit*. It is remarkable that Herder does not say *Erziehung*. This is because education is, in his eyes, materialist by definition: it supposes the omnipotence of a demiurgic educator who moulds his student to his will: "There was a time when everyone stormed for *education* [...] As if all that could *change* and *form inclinations!*" (*Es war eine Zeit, da alles auf Erziehung stürmte* [...]) *Als wenn alle das Neigungen ändern und bilden könnte?*) (p. 543/68; *PW* 323). Insofar as it pretends to sculpt the student according to a pre-existing model,³⁰ education can be called a *Bildung*, but in such a case it is precisely what one must oppose, a bookish and despotic education that imposes on everyone the same abstract yardstick and that dissociates the head and the heart (pp. 539–541/64–66). In another sense, culture may be called an *Erziehung* insofar as one wants to underscore that

²⁸ See Brummack/Bollacher (note 23), pp. 818, 822 and 826–827.

²⁹ See Brummack/Bollacher (note 23), p. 830.

³⁰ A *Bild* or a *Muster* (p. 506/32).

which ties it to divine government: “what a chosen *garden of God* for raising the first, most delicate *human plants*!” ([...] *welch ein erwählter Garten Gottes zur Erziehung der ersten, zartesten Menschengewächse!*) (p. 480/8; *PW* 275). In truth, *Bildung* correctly understood, the “allgemeine Bildung der Menschheit” with which the work closes, opposes itself to *Erziehung* because it is a process that Providence governs according to immanent modalities: true *Bildung* is a *Sichbilden*,³¹ a formation of humanity by itself. And while Herder expresses himself in the manner of Lessing and will, in 1785, evoke the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, he will interpret this as an education of each generation by the previous one, an education that does not double humanity into two categories:³² unlike a machine that cannot make itself work by itself (“die Maschine spielt nicht sich selbst”), “there is thus an education of the human race, for the very reason that every human only becomes a human through education and the entire race lives in nothing other than this chain of individuals.” (*Es gibt also eine Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts; eben weil jeder Mensch nur durch Erziehung ein Mensch wird und das ganze Geschlecht nicht anders als in dieser Kette von Individuen lebet*). If there is such a thing as education, it is pronominal self-education of the species by itself, *Selbsttätigkeit*, and this can be considered as “the principle for the history of humanity, without which there could be no such history.” (*das Principium zur Geschichte der Menschheit, ohne welches es keine solche Geschichte gäbe*).³³ In the end, one must say that to “contribute to the formation of humanity,” is, negatively, to refuse to want to educate humanity in the belief that one is the depository of the true form that must be traced; and it is, positively, to facilitate the realization of a process whose nature remains to be determined—insofar as it is determinable . . .

³¹ See Rudolf Vierhaus, “Bildung”, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–1997), 1: 515 and Emmanuel Renault, “Le concept hégélien de civilisation et ses signifiants”, ed. Bertrand Binoche, *Les équivoques de la civilisation* (Seyssel, 2005), pp. 230–231.

³² He thus anticipated the critique formulated by Marx in the third of the *Theses on Feuerbach*.

³³ *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, bk. 9, §1 (ed. Suphan, 13:345).

2. *A Progression Without Progress?*

This process is characterised, paradoxically, by the fact that it presents itself as a progression without progress.³⁴ This means that we must in effect conceive of the historic course of things as a course, a process, without thinking of it as an ongoing improvement that would imply a hierarchy between the succeeding stages in function of their proximity to a final model of perfection. Whether we can really think this, and under what conditions, is the difficulty upon which the reader stumbles at the outset. It is useful to note the names that Herder gives, or does not give, to universal history.

There are first all of the terms constructed with the prefix *fort*, beginning with *Fortgang*. By this we must understand what an Enlightenment Frenchman called “un progrès,” that is to say a change in which there is no subtext suggesting that the change is a happy one: the term is axiologically neutral, like its Latin equivalent *Progression* (p. 522/47). When Herder uses just the word *Gang*, it is often to remind his reader that this change, in the last instance, is desired by God: “der Gang Gottes” or “der Gang der Vorsehung.” But it is entirely notable that he superposes thus “der Gang Gottes in der Natur” to “der Gang Gottes unter die Nationen”:³⁵ this signifies that God acts in the course of history and the cycle of nations as in nature. Or, to put it another way, the government of Providence is univocal. As for the *Übergang*, it designates the mysterious passage from one nation to another (p. 494/21).

That God acts naturally in history explains the recurrent identification of *Fortgang* with *Entwicklung*.³⁶ This last term designates a development with an organic character—an evolution, if we want, and a continual evolution (p. 512/38). We could oppose it to revolution if we understand by that word an “eternal revolution” (*eine ewige Revolution*), that is to say the chaos that the Voltairean sceptics see in history because they are unable to perceive the leading thread that Herder qualifies *a contrario* as a “universal striving” (*ein ewiges Streben*).³⁷ But we should not conclude

³⁴ Max Rouché, *La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, p. 107: “[...] il y a progression, mais non pas progrès [...]”.

³⁵ Pp. 532/58, 565/90 et 576/100.

³⁶ Pp. 489/16, 511/37, 512/38 and 513/38. F. Meinecke correctly underscored this naturalist immersion of providence in the historical course of things (*Die Entstehung des Historismus*, p. 391).

³⁷ Pp. 511/37 et 512/38. “Streben” suggests “Fortstreben” (p. 511/36) or “Fortstrebung” (p. 523/49).

that evolution excludes all forms of revolution: on the contrary it is the vitiating philosophy of the Enlightenment that would like history to be a continuous, calm succession without any radical upheaval. In reality, revolutions accomplish evolution; they are the ruptures that occur against the background of an irreducible continuity.³⁸ Development suggests, by definition, a germ or seed,³⁹ and Iselin said as much; but Herder uses also the evangelical, Christian metaphors of leaven⁴⁰ and fermentation,⁴¹ thus crossing the language of the Enlightenment with that of the Bible. Naturally, to apprehend history on the model of organic development tends to exclude architectural metaphors, and it is only exceptionally that Herder suggests a *Fortgebäude* (p. 566/90).

It is equally rare to see him use the word *Fortschritt*,⁴² but it does occur, proving that the antinomy is not entirely clear.⁴³ As we can imagine, *Fortgang* does oppose itself to *Verbesserung*: it is the Parisian philosophy that conceives of history as a process of improvement;⁴⁴ but it could also be Herder himself speaking when, with something of a paradox he speaks of *Verbesserung* with regards to the middle-ages (pp. 526–7/51–2). Finally, the opposition appears categorical with the concept of *Vervollkommenung*: it is wrong that each age displays a perfection superior to the preceding age.⁴⁵ This perfectly contradicts what Iselin had affirmed: “*So machte ein jeder Fortgang zu einer Vollkommenheit, den Schritt zu einer höhern nötig, wie er demselben zugleich erleichterte.*” Iselin thus accorded euphorically the last word to perfection, concluding his book, “*Und denn ist euer Triumph nicht mehr weit von seiner Vollkommenheit entfernt.*” By perfection,

³⁸ Pp. 526/51 and 532/57–58. See Wulf Koepke, *Johann Gottfried Herder*, p. 34: “[...] revolution is not a sign of chaos, it is rather a sign of continuity and order, and above all of vitality.” It was in 1792 in *Titon und Aurora* that Herder would develop the opposition evolution/revolution on the basis of palingenesis (*Zerstreute Blätter*, vierte Sammlung, 8; ed. Suphan, 16: 109–128).

³⁹ *Der Keim*: for example, pp. 477/5, 483/10, 580/104.

⁴⁰ *Das Teig*: p. 521/47.

⁴¹ *Das Ferment, die Gährung*: pp. 516/42, 520/45, 527/52. See Pierre Pénisson, “Le destin du développement dans *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire* de Herder,” ed. Bernard Balan, Olivier Bloch & Paulette Carrive, *Entre forme et histoire* (Paris, 1988), pp. 287–289.

⁴² As we have often noted. In addition to Rouché note 33, see the postface of Irmscher, p. 189 and S. Pickford, “Does the End,” p. 241. This assertion is criticized by Britta Rupp-Eisenreich, “La marche de Dieu dans la nature ou le sens de *Entwicklung* chez Herder,” ed. Pierre Pénisson, *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire* (Iasi [Roumanie], 1997), p. 189.

⁴³ Pp. 503/30 (“die Fortschritte der Bildung”) and 558/83 (“allmählich fortschreitend”).

⁴⁴ Pp. 511/37 et 532/57.

⁴⁵ Pp. 554/79 et 557/82.

one was meant to understand the final harmony of the faculties permitting us to combine perfectly virtue, science, and happiness.⁴⁶

The historical process, in fact, cannot be conceived as this type of succession; rather, we need to understand it as a succession of mixed conditions that cannot be compared: "Is humanity capable of pure *perfection* in a single present condition at all? Peak borders on valley." ([...] *ist die Menschheit überhaupt in einem jetzigen Zustande reiner Vollkommenheit fähig? Gipfel grenzt an Tal*).⁴⁷ This does not mean that we must assign to every people a degree of perfection, but rather that we must understand a people as a coherent totality of perfections and imperfections, of gains and losses, advantages and disadvantages: "The human container is *capable of no full perfection all at once*; it must always *leave behind* in moving further on." (*Das menschliche Gefäß ist einmal keiner Vollkommenheit fähig; muß immer verlassen, indem es weiterrückt*) (p. 498/25; *PW* 288). Thus the rejection of pure perfection does not signify the indefinite nature of perfection itself—that would be no doubt an anachronism, and certainly a misinterpretation—but its absence, pure and simple. History connects a series of specific, individual perfections that one cannot order hierarchically because that would presuppose a common measure: "each human perfection is *national, generational [säkular]*, and, considered most exactly, *individual*." ([...] *ist also jede menschliche Vollkommenheit national, säkular, und am genauesten betrachtet, individuell*) (p. 505/32; *PW* 294). This fundamental thesis demands three remarks:

1. The perfection that properly characterizes each nation is not simply given,⁴⁸ it is won against adversities that stimulate the development of certain forces and inhibit others:⁴⁹ for example, it is because Egypt did not have any wood that the Egyptians had to learn to build with stone (p. 489/16). In general, "People form to greater fullness only what *time, clime, need, world, fate* gives occasion for. Turned away from the rest." (*man bildet nichts aus, als wozu Zeit, Klima, Bedürfnis, Welt, Schicksal Anlaß gibt; vom übrigen abgekehrt; [...]*) (p. 505/32; *PW* 294). This is why

⁴⁶ *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, bk. 1, chp. 29 (1: 96–97); bk. 5, chp. 1 (2: 10); and bk. 8, chp. 39 (2: 437).

⁴⁷ P. 508/34; *PW* 295. Here we find again the metaphor of the summit being inseparable from the valley, p. 527/52.

⁴⁸ This runs counter to Rouché, who extends Herder's argument, suggesting that if humanity has a history, nations do not have histories. (*La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, p. 88).

⁴⁹ Pp. 507/33 & 516/42.

every national history presents itself as a cycle that has “its period of growth, of bloom, and of decline.” (*seine Periode des Wachstums, der Blüte und der Abnahme*) (p. 504/30; *PW* 293).

2. Because there is no available model of perfection, we must not permit ourselves to compare: “at bottom all *comparison* proves to be *problematic*.” (*im Grunde also wird alle Vergleichung mißlich*).⁵⁰ But we misunderstand this if we take it to mean that this excludes *all* types of comparison. Certainly we cannot compare with reference to a common and hierarchical standard, but we can and must necessarily compare, for example, the Egyptian moment with that of the Patriarchs: “An exact comparison of the Oriental and Egyptian spirits would inevitably show that my analogy taken from human ages in life is no play.” (*Eine genaue Vergleichung des Morgenländischen und Ägyptischen Geistes müßte zeigen, daß meine Analogie von menschlichen Lebensaltern hergenommen, nicht Spiel sei.*) (p. 488/15; *PW* 281). But what does “an exact comparison” mean here? It means that Herder will show the functional equivalencies in showing, for example, how, in Egypt, agricultural activity and the civil laws that this entails “replace” (*ersetzen*) the essentially religious and oracular allure of the patriarch’s era; correlatively, civic loyalty takes the place (*war dafür*) of the natural familial sentiment that reigned previously. On this entire page, we see Herder describe a series of substitutions, just as, on the next page, we will see him explain that the China of today is the image (*Nachbild*) of ancient Egypt. This too is a type of comparison, this time between a historical Occidental people and a people who belong to an entirely different historicity. This comparativism is decisive because it assures, at least in the first part and at least in part,⁵¹ the continuity of the whole without carrying with it any type of axiology: we can compare without subordinating.

3. We are now in a better condition to understand how the history of humanity can be a development without being a process of perfection, and how this continual development can take place without any moment being able to claim superiority of any sort. It is in this sense that we must interpret the formula according to which, from the source to the sea, the river “always remains water!” (*bleibt aber immer Wasser !*): there is no state of nature here where Man might be observed in his naked truth, nor is there a moment of triumphant arrival where he might finally

⁵⁰ P. 509/35; *PW* 296; see also pp. 494/21 et 523/49.

⁵¹ See *infra*, pp. 213–214.

realize himself.⁵² That said, Herder does not express himself without reservations: the process is nonetheless a “growth” and it seems that we must recognize some sort of perfection, but it is an enigmatic one: “That obviously this *growth*, this *progress*⁵³ from each other, is not ‘*perfection* in the narrow sense of the schools has, it seems to me, been shown by our whole view.’” (*Daß offenbar dieses Erwachsen, dieser Fortgang aus einander nicht, Vervollkommenung im eingeschränkten Schulsinne sei, hat, dünkt mich, der ganze Blick gezeigt*).⁵⁴ But how, in light of all that we have said on all that Herder has insisted upon, may we view the historical process as nonetheless a kind of perfection—in a non-scholastic sense? Is it possible that Herder failed to disentangle simple succession from progress? And, indeed, this demarcation had become quite delicate since he could no longer make use of the commodious division—available to Bossuet—between the cyclical time of profane history and the progressive time of sacred history. We can imagine, then, that it is this homogenization of the course of history that forced him to mix the succession of the profane peoples with the gradual victory of Christianity. From this point of view, the distinction between a vulgar and a noble sense of “perfection” is merely the rhetorical guise for an incapacity to reconstitute in the modern and univocal age of the “philosophies of history,” the grand Augustinian distinction between the two cities.⁵⁵ But before we conclude that Herder failed in this way we should consider whether we have truly grasped the central concepts of this strange discourse.

3. *Means Without Ends?*

Against the triumphant scepticism of the Parisian *philosophes*, Herder relentlessly affirms and reaffirms the existence of a historical teleology.

⁵² P. 512/38. On this point, Herder approaches Ferguson, who had written in 1767, “If we asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? We may answer, it is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great-Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan. While this active being is in the train of employing his talents, and of operating on the subjects around him, all situations are equally natural,” *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1966), Bk. 1, chp. 1, p. 8.

⁵³ [Note that here and throughout, the Cambridge translation has ‘progress’ for *Fortgang*; naturally, Bertrand Binoche’s interpretation here would suggest reading this as *progression*.—Translator.]

⁵⁴ P. 555/79; *PW* 331. A similar distinction is made at p. 512/38; see also *infra*, p. 211.

⁵⁵ Bertrand Binoche, *Les trois sources des philosophies de l’histoire (1764–1798)* (Québec, 2008), pp. 175–186.

In the natural world, as in the world of human affairs, one can discern a finality—the same finality that prevents us from egoistically cultivating our gardens in the belief that we’ve seen it all before: from Herder’s point of view, *Candide* is just as naive (just as *candide*) at the end as at the beginning in believing that he has nothing to understand. If we want to render intelligible the spirit of a nation,⁵⁶ we must see each nation as a means towards an ulterior end: the real philosopher of history is the one who is capable of seeing the scenes as “means to purposes” (*Mittel zu Zwecken*) (p. 513/39; *PW* 299). Thus, the Phoenicians are a “transition” (*Übergang*) to the Greeks (p. 494/21; *PW* 285). Thus, as well, did medieval institutions serve to construct the Europe of today (pp. 524–5/49–51). Individuals and peoples are never anything but instruments (*Werkzeuge*), and one can even say that “the course of Providence proceeds to its goal even over millions of corpses!” (*der Gang der Vorsehung geht auch über Millionen Leichname zum Ziel!*) (p. 576/100; *PW* 350).

At the same time—and the two ends of this chain, always the same, are decidedly difficult to hold onto—the critique of perfection (a concept that we know to be nothing other than the Enlightenment’s self-legitimation) leads Herder to reject all teleology that would *reduce* every element to its instrumental function. This time it is no doubt Iselin whom Herder has in mind. But this allows us to understand the vivid reaction that Herder will evince a decade later reading the third proposition of Kant’s *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte*: we cannot admit that every generation works only for the following generation and that it has no other *raison d’être* than that which it will never enjoy, an infinite process of serving the future.⁵⁷ This point is very important as it reveals the specific form that philosophy of history took in Germany: as soon as theodicy becomes theodicy of history, one finds oneself stumbling on the question of how to write off all the losses of the past and present—and even future—generations! The proof that this is a serious problem can be found in Kant’s admission (in a text that drew a strong reaction from Herder) that there is something “astonishing” (*befremdend*) and “mysterious” (*rätselhaft*) in this.⁵⁸ It is also a problem that we see again in Schiller, at the end of the sixth letter of his 1795 *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, where

⁵⁶ Let us recall that Voltaire had given as a title of his grand historical work of 1756, *Essai sur les mœurs et sur l’esprit des nations*.

⁵⁷ See the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, bk. 8 chp. 5 et bk. 15, chp. 5 (ed. Suphan, 13:338–342 et 14:246).

⁵⁸ In the edition of the Berlin Academy (Akademie-Ausgabe), 8:20.

he denounces as absurd such a massive sacrifice. And two years before that, in the twenty-fifth letter of the *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, Herder added that we could not escape this problem by claiming that the individual thus sacrificed to his descendants will find happiness in the other world, for this is a strategy that would rob the individual of his existence in this world (*sein hiesiges Dasein rauben*).⁵⁹

Just as we must, then, think of a development that is not a kind of progress, we must equally conceive of a teleology that is not sacrificial. It is the same problem articulated in a different manner. We find the sharpest formulation of this in a thesis that Herder repeats numerous times and that amounts to saying that *means are ends*. Consider, for example, the middle-ages: "But not a thing in the whole of God's realm, am I able to persuade myself though!, is only means—everything *means* and *purpose* simultaneously, and hence certainly these centuries [are so] too." (*Aber kein Ding im ganzen Reiche Gottes kann ich mich doch überreden! ist allein Mittel—alles Mittel und Zweck zugleich, und so gewiß auch diese Jahrhunderte*) (p. 527/53; *PW* 310). This is therefore true of us, who are "in our place a purpose and tool of fate." (*auf unsrer Stelle Zweck und Werkzeug des Schicksals*). (p. 557/82; *PW* 334). This is true in a general way, and it allows him to sketch a cosmology that finds in this its constitutive principle: "Behold the whole *universe from heaven to earth*—what is means?, what is purpose? Is not everything means for *millions of purposes*? Is not everything the purpose of *millions of means*?" (*Siehe das ganze Weltall von Himmel zu Erde—was ist Mittel? was ist Zweck? nicht alles Mittel zu Millionen Zwecken? nicht alles Zweck von Millionen Mitteln?*) (p. 559/84; *PW* 335).

The question, then, becomes how to understand this reciprocity. We must first of all attribute a weak, almost trivial meaning to it: every end is, in its turn, a means for another end; in short, every end is relative, with the exception of that great thing that Herder references at several instances with the phrase "ins Große,"⁶⁰ by which we must no doubt understand an ultimate end—and his obscurity here is intentional. In this perspective, the most telling metaphor is certainly that of the chain in which each link is simultaneously attached to the one preceding and the one following it. Thus, every nation is an end for the one preceding it and a means for the one that it helps bring into existence. To take just one example, the Phoe-

⁵⁹ Ed. Suphan, 17: 120.

⁶⁰ Pp. 523/49; 528/53; 579/103. Or "aufs Ganze" (p. 584/109).

nicians are an end for the patriarchal age and a “instruments of onward guidance” (*ein Werkzeug der Fortleitung*) leading to Greece (p. 494/21; *PW* 286). This is, in brief, a series, a succession. But we can also conceive of this finality in a holist manner: the end is relative not to the thing that follows it, but to the whole (*das Weltall*) in which it finds its place. The metaphor of the chain, then, returns, but it is complicated by the fact that the finality is reversible; after having written that everything is a means towards millions of ends, and vice-versa, Herder adds, “The chain of almighty, all-wise goodness is entwined one part *into* and *through* the other a thousandfold” (*Tausendfach die Kette der allmächtigen, allweisen Güte in und durch einandergeschlungen* [. . .]) (p. 559/84; *PW* 335).

But we can, and must, further understand this formula in a strong sense, for to say that the means is not merely a means towards other means is equally to say that it is an end *in itself*. The identification of the ends and the means does not take us back to the order of the constitutive elements of the series of the whole, but rather signifies the intrinsic positivity of every era-nation. From this new point of view, the Phoenicians are not an end of the Patriarchs, but are an end in themselves, and providence wanted them for *what they are* and not for what they will lead to. That which they lost on the one hand (patriotism) they gained on the other (mobility) and we ought to rejoice at the spectacle that history presents to us of these relative, singular, and incomparable perfections—perfections that cannot be ordered in a hierarchy. Theodicy obliges! It is in Leibniz that Herder found this scheme: “For the wisest does his best to see that the means are also ends of some sort, that is to say desirable not merely for what they make, but also for what they are.”⁶¹ Of course, for Leibniz this is a problem of divine economy, and to will the means necessary for them to *be* is to will them for their simplicity and their fecundity; it is to affirm that one cannot correctly evaluate the goodness of the effect if we proceed abstractly, without paying attention to the temperate and sober nature of the means employed to produce them. For Herder, it is important to reject a sacrificial theodicy of perfection; and to affirm that means are ends is to affirm that they have no less reality than that which follows from them: every nation represents a happy compound without equal, as happy as every other, and necessary for the arrival of that which will follow it. The teleological vocation invested in the peoples selected by

⁶¹ *Essais de théodicée*, part 2, §208. I would like to thank my colleague Paul Rateau for finding this reference for me.

universal history is not accompanied by any progressive perfection, any growth of virtue, intelligence or happiness, and if the Phoenicians lead to the Greeks they have no reason to envy the Greeks. The instrumental metaphor that we read here has its limits: the instrument is homogenous with that whose existence it makes possible. It is not worth less than the end that it accomplishes, and it is wanted for itself as much as for its product.

But we find ourselves always returning to the question of whether we can sustain this reconciliation of teleology (continuity) and incomparability (discontinuity), if we can fully dissociate finality from progress. The last part of the work contains some declarations that appear to prophecy a superior era: "behold the *higher age* that beckons forth." (*siehe das höhere Zeitalter, was vorwinkt*) (p. 574/99; *PW* 348). This superiority appears to signify a process of moral perfection: "The *refinement* and the *purifying progress* of *concepts of virtue* from the *sensuous ages of childhood up through all of history* is clear [...]" (*Verfeinerung und läuternder Fortgang der Tugendbegriffe aus den sinnlichsten Kindeszeiten hinauf durch alle Geschichte ist offenbar [...]*) (p. 575/99; *PW* 349). And this moral improvement appears to depend on "higher than human *this-worldly existence*" (*ein höheres als menschlich Hiessein*) (p. 567/91; *PW* 342), which suggested, confusingly (though the confusion is no doubt necessary), a celestial mode of existence, the mode in which one will finally see clearly.⁶² Now, once we have this conviction, another philosophy of history truly becomes possible: "the result of ruin-filled history [...]" will show us *plan* where we formerly found *confusion*. Everything occurs in its proper place – *history of humanity* in the noblest sense—you will come to be!" (*uns Plan zeigen, wo wir sonst Verwirrung fanden: Alles findet sich an Stelle und Ort—Geschichte der Menschheit im edelsten Verstande—du wirst werden!*) (*ibid.*). It will be; it does not yet exist. Afterwards we will be able to discern a true (celestial) perfection where the philosopher of the Enlightenment sees only a false (earthly) perfection. We will be able to see that to which the succession of universal history's chosen peoples have brought us—not to the eudemonistic conjunction of science, virtue, and happiness, but rather to a form of existence that evokes that of the body glorious after the resurrection. For the moment, we can merely affirm the

⁶² Some commentators see here—and it is undoubtedly tempting—a sketch of the ulterior theory of palingenesis (see the translation of Max Rouché, *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris, 1964), p. 323, note 1).

existence of a finality distinct from that of the *philosophes*, without being able to determine its exact nature. What we lack is the *point of view* from which the entire history of humanity will be revealed in its most noble sense—that is to say, in its spiritual sense.

4. *A History without a Point of View?*

If there is a finality, then, there is an ultimate end. We already know what it is not: the optimal harmony of the human faculties. But we also know that it remains extremely indeterminate. We are working towards a great end,⁶³ but we do not know positively what it is: “for we run in the light of a *will-o-the-wisp* and *twilight* and *fog*.” (*denn wir laufen in Irrlicht und Dämmerung und Nebel*) (p. 580/104; *PW* 353). Now, the opacity of this end carries with it, *ipso facto*, the impossibility, for the philosopher, to pull himself up to a point of view from which history could present itself as a tableau in which its entire coherence would reveal itself.⁶⁴ This is a thesis that Herder insists upon. It does not merely mean that historical actors, being the instruments of Providence, are “without *viewpoint* or *view*” (*ohne Gesichtspunkt und Ansicht*) (p. 585/109; *PW* 357). It means that no human view will be sufficiently capacious to take in the whole simultaneously: “[...] with the human species there can be a *greater plan of God’s in the whole* which an individual creature precisely does not survey” ([...] *mit dem Menschengeschlecht ein größerer Plan Gottes im Ganzen sein könne, den eben ein einzelnes Geschöpf nicht übersieht*[...]) (p. 558/83; *PW* 335). But the most important passage on this question, and perhaps the most important of the entire work, is the following:

Can there be a *distant prospect* without an *elevation*? If you hold your face close up to the image, carve at this sliver, pick at that little lump of pigment, you never see the *whole image*—you see anything but an *image*! [...] Incidentally, I know as well as you do that every *general image*, every *general concept*, is only an *abstraction*—it is only the Creator who *thinks* the whole *unity of one, of all*, nations in all their *manifoldness* without having the *unity* thereby fade for him.” (*Kanns eine weite Aussicht geben, ohne Höhe? Wenn du das Angesicht dicht an dem Bilde hältst, an diesem Späne schnitzelst, an jenem Farbenklümpfchen klaubest: nie siehest du das ganze Bild—siehest*

⁶³ *Ins Große*: see *supra*, note 60.

⁶⁴ On the notion of a “tableau historique”, see the diverse explanations expressed in Bertrand Binoche, ed. *Nouvelles lectures du Tableau historique de Condorcet* (Québec, 2010).

nichts weniger als Bild! [...] Übrigens weiß ichs wie du, daß jedes allgemeine Bild, jeder allgemeine Begriff nur Abstraktion sei— Schöpfer allein ists, der die ganze Einheit, einer, aller Nationen, in alle ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit denkt, ohne daß ihm dadurch die Einheit schwinde (p. 504–505/31; PW 293).

We can surely qualify this thesis as constituting an “apologetics” but only if we bear in mind the great distance between it and the no-less apologetic thesis of Bossuet a century earlier in his famous *Sermon sur la Providence* from March 10, 1662. When Bossuet compared the spectacle of the human world to an anamorphosis whose hidden “justesse” we can only discern by “looking at it from a particular point of view that Jesus-Christ reveals to us,”⁶⁵ he equated this synoptic point of view with faith and he accorded it at the same time to the Christian. Herder says rather the inverse: God has the monopoly on this perspective and it is not faith that permits us to discern the hidden key of history; it is history itself that we must believe in to nourish faith: “*Glaube an Geschichte—durch Geschichte Glaube an Gott.*”⁶⁶ History authorizes us to affirm that there is an end and not to despair; history is “*encouragement to hope, to act, to believe*, even where one sees *nothing or not everything.*” (Aufmunterung zu hoffen, zu handeln, zu glauben, selbst wo man nichts, oder nicht alles sieht!) (p. 513/39; PW 299). But it does not permit us to affirm the exact nature of this end.

Against this ideal, impossible tableau—or at least impossible to man in his actual condition—against this tableau that is prematurely claimed by presumptuous theologians we must set the opposite, bad tableau—that of the philosophers. This philosophical picture is of two types. We have already touched on the first: these are *tableaux* in the most pictorial sense of the word (*das Gemälde*) that pretend to give the totality of the picture that has happened up until the *his et nunc*; that is, that identify *the* point of view as that of the present, their present. We might think of Iselin, who thinks that from Basel in 1764 one can perceive in its truth the universal course of things: “Still, therefore, a beautiful picture, *order* and *progress* of nature, and you shining philosopher of course on the shoulders of all!” (*Noch immer also schönes Gemälde, Ordnung und Fortgang der Natur, und du glänzender Philosoph ja allem auf den Schultern*) (p. 527/53; PW 310). The second is the type of tableau in the English sense of the word “table” (as in ‘multiplication tables’) (*die Tabelle*), and here it is of Montesquieu

⁶⁵ *Sermons choisis de Bossuet* (Paris, s.d.), p. 65. On this point, see Gérard Ferreyrolles, “L’influence de la conception augustinienne de l’histoire au XVII^e siècle”, *Dix-septième Siècle*, 135 (1982), pp. 216–241.

⁶⁶ Cited by H.D. Irmscher in his postface (see *supra*, note 6) p. 157.

that we must think: “what a *vision of the whole*, as though on a *map* and a *philosophical table*! Has developed first principles through the mouth of Montesquieu, from and according to which a *hundred diverse peoples* and *regions* get calculated extempore in two moments according to the *one-times-one of politics*.” (*Welche Ansicht des Ganzen gebracht, wie auf einer Landcharte und philosophischen Tabelle! Grundsätze durch den Mund Montesquieus entwickelt, aus und nach welchen hundert verschiedene Völker und Erdstriche, aus dem Stegreif nach dem Ein mal Eins der Politik in zwei Augenblicken berechnet werden*) (p. 536/62; PW 318).

We might be surprised to see Herder here condemning the author of the concept “l’esprit général de la nation.”⁶⁷ By this, indeed, Montesquieu understood above all the shifting institutional correlations that make a people what it is—and what it will become; does not Herder say the very same thing when he repeatedly underscores that every people is characterized by certain solid traits, by interior equilibriums where peaks and valleys meet in unique ways? Does not Herder struggle to discern “*the universal connection between time periods and peoples*.” (die allgemeine Verbindung von Zeitläufen und Völkern)?⁶⁸ Does he not take care to distinguish the separate activities of “justifying” and “explaining the reasons for” (Montesquieu’s “rendre les raisons”) a given institution (e.g., Polygamy) or, in Herder’s words, “defending” (*verteidigen*) and “explaining” (*erklären*) (e.g., the crusades)?⁶⁹ We will understand better this criticism if we return to his more detailed 1769 treatment of *De l’esprit des lois*.⁷⁰ Montesquieu’s work appeared to him at first (as it did to everyone⁷¹) as a kind of physics whose effect was to place in hierarchical order the laws of the political world by reducing them to the smallest possible number. This is why Herder saw Montesquieu’s work as a table that claims to offer a means of calculating in an instant the preferable constitutional combinations. In response to this dream, which is dangerous and despotic because it tends to uniformize, Herder offered three objections. First, Montesquieu induced far too quickly and from insufficient data his three great types of

⁶⁷ *De l’esprit des lois*, bk. 19, chap. 4. See Bertrand Binoche, *Introduction à De l’esprit des lois de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1998), pp. 137 & 159–160.

⁶⁸ See p. 496/23; PW 287 & *De l’esprit des lois*, bk. 1, chp. 1.

⁶⁹ See p. 526/51 & *De l’esprit des lois*, bk. 16, chp. 4.

⁷⁰ See the “Gedanken bei Lesung Montesquieus” in *Werke*, ed. Pross, 3 vol. (Münich, 1984–2002) 1:468–472.

⁷¹ See Denis de Casabianca, *Montesquieu. De l’étude des sciences à l’esprit des lois* (Paris, 2008), *passim*.

government:⁷² at base, he knew only France, Turkey, Venice, and a couple ancient democracies. Second, in focusing on governments, he overstated the importance of juridical norms, as if it were the written law that made a people. In reality written law is but the shadow whose body one must find in the mores and customs. Third, he ascribed to these institutions an artificial stability: in reality, they change all the time in the space of a political geography that is itself in constant motion. In short, Montesquieu elaborated a false science, and the tableau that he proposed of the human world was a purely abstract construction, incapable of grasping the essential matter: not the spirit of the laws, but rather the spirit of each people, which is always an exception, which refers us back to a "living instinct,"⁷³ and which is what we must consider in universal history. In 1774, Herder went on to reaffirm the foundational role of instinct.⁷⁴

A totalising secular tableau (in the sense of either a painting or a scientific table) with which we could contemplate history is thus not available to us, and with respect to points of view, we can only speak in a conditional sense: "[...] *all these scenes* still perhaps can form a *whole*, a *main performance* of which indeed the *individual, selfish player* could *know* and *see* nothing but which the *audience member with the right viewpoint* and *tranquilly awaiting the sequence's whole* could well see." ([...] *alle Szenen noch etwa ein Ganzes, eine Hauptvorstellung machen können, von der freilich der einzelne, eingennützig Spieler nichts wissen und sehen, die aber der Zuschauer im rechten Gesichtspunkte und in ruhiger Abwartung des Folgeganzen wohl sehen könnte*) (p. 559/83–84; *PW* 335). When Herder appears to say the opposite and to claim an absolute vantage point he is certainly employing a parodic mode: "It can be seen that the matter is observed by a foreigner who could be a Muslim and a Mameluke in order to write precisely that [i.e., the expansion of Christianity]." (*Man siehet, daß die Sache ein Fremdling betrachtet, der Muselman und Mameluke sein könnte, um eben das zu schreiben*) (p. 518/44; *PW* 303). It is clear here that Herder is adopting the point of view of the Enlightenment's Persian, not for the purpose of ridiculing Christianity by relativising it, but rather to confer all the required objectivity to the affirmation of its historical positivity. But a totalizing, eschatological tableau in which the truth of the universal course of history will be revealed after the fact is not possible

⁷² That is to say, republican (aristocratic or democratic), monarchical, and despotic. See *De l'esprit des lois*, bk. II, chp. 1.

⁷³ "Gedanken bei Lesung Montesquieus", p. 471.

⁷⁴ *Instinkt* or *Trieb*: see, especially, pp. 480/8, 503/29, 526/51, 538/63.

either, despite the fact that it is destined to become possible, and despite the fact that it has already begun: "Philosopher, if you want to honor and benefit your century's situation—the *book of preceding history* lies before you!, *locked* with seven seals, a *miracle book full of prophecy*—the *end of days* has reached you!, read!" (*Philosoph, willst du den Stand deines Jahrhunderts ehren und nutzen: das Buch der Vorgeschichte liegt vor dir! mit sieben Siegeln verschlossen; ein Wunderbuch voll Weißsagung: auf dich ist das Ende der Tage kommen! lies!*) (p. 561–562/86; *PW* 337). This declaration precedes a resume of the two first parts of the book, and it does not signify that we have the distance necessary to be able to perceive history "in a higher sense,"⁷⁵ as God currently can, but it does suggest that we might one day have this perspective ourselves.

5. *Knowledge by Default of Universal History*

But how can Herder maintain a position so full of tensions? We will understand him better if we ask ourselves what is meant by "point of view" in philosophies of history.⁷⁶ Inasmuch as universal history is a sum of singular histories, the point from which we could arrange them rationally is assumed to be *exterior*. When Bossuet in 1662 evoked the precise vantage point from which the anamorphosis reveals its hidden truth, he was speaking of an exteriority—without this, the metaphor would make no sense. But when Voltaire, the most vigorous enemy of Bossuet, wished to be a philosopher of history in the sense discussed above it entailed, paradoxically, continuing to claim, in the wake of classical antiquity, a position that transcends all particular interests: "The philosopher has no fatherland, no faction," he wrote in 1768.⁷⁷ No doubt impartial cosmopolitanism had replaced all-too-partisan faith, but it was no less exterior to the historical world. In contrast, once history becomes an all-encompassing process, everything changes because the point of view that permits us to discern its rationality is assumed to be within history itself. The historian's partiality is no longer a matter of some contingent characteristics

⁷⁵ This is the formula that Herder uses at many occasions and to which we have already drawn the reader's attention (see *supra*, p. 202). He uses it on p. 561/86, right before this citation.

⁷⁶ The essential reference here is Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Francfort-sur-le-Main, 1979), part 2, ch. 5.

⁷⁷ *Réflexions sur l'histoire et en particulier sur l'histoire d'Angleterre de Monsieur Hume* in *Œuvres complètes*, 75 vols. (Paris, 1825), 36:429.

(such as his national, confessional or social attachments) that the historian might be able to transcend by some heroic effort of rationality; rather, this partiality is due to his inescapable present, the time in which he is condemned both to reconstitute the past and to anticipate the future. This is an irreducible relativity that is to be distinguished as much from the point of view of divine omniscience as from the contingent relativity engendered by the particularity of each person's social environment. But this relativity does not undermine the possibility of the historian's task; it is not an obstacle, but is rather the *constitutive limit*. It is a limit because we can no longer pretend that we can pull ourselves out of the process in which we find ourselves. The constitutive limit, because it is precisely here where historical discourse is situated, is not its congenital defect, but rather its fundamental characteristic.

A good example of this is the famous lesson that Schiller, in Jena in 1789, drew under the title *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte*.⁷⁸ Only an infinite intelligence can "entirely and completely (*ganz und vollzählich*)" apprehend universal history as "a chain of events" (*eine Kette von Begebenheiten*). What holds back the historian of this world is, of course, first the purely factual reasons such as the disappearance or corruption of the necessary documents. But in addition to this, there is a methodological obstacle: of the remaining evidence, the historian will only retain that which contributes to the explanation of our present: "From the entire sum of these events the universal historian draws out those that have had an essential, indisputable and easy to follow effect on the *contemporary* form of the world and the condition of the current generation." (*Aus der ganzen Summe dieser Begebenheiten hebt der Universalhistoriker diejenigen heraus, welche die heutige Gestalt der Welt und den Zustand der jetzt lebenden Generation einen wesentlichen, unwidersprechlichen und leicht zu verfolgenden Einfluß gehabt haben*). It is here, the present of the world, to which the historian belongs, that constitutes the point of view, by definition changing, from which he works *post festum*. But Schiller does not consider this to be an epistemological obstacle: he sees this, on the contrary, as the central point of the historian. It is *in function* of the present, and not *in spite of* its relativity, that we must reconstitute the course of universal history. It is not that we have to resign ourselves to our own finitude; rather we have to make of our finitude the positive substance of historical discourse.

⁷⁸ Schillers Werke. National Ausgabe, 43 vols. (Weimar, 1943–) 17:370–373.

We have seen that Herder does not allow himself to adopt the point of view of an infinite intelligence, which for him would mean reconciling unity and diversity. But he refuses this perspective in order to build on the present, as on a kind of *telos* from which the grand epochs of universal history will follow, as Schiller would say, “easily.” Indeed, from the position we inhabit *a little* of this necessity reveals itself, but not all. To contemplate the tableau of history, we are able to take a partial step back—but it is *only* a partial step. This is why the final intention of the Divinity can be discovered “only through *openings* and the *ruins of individual scenes*” (*nur durch Öffnungen und Trümmern einzelner Szenen*) (p. 513/38; *PW* 299). It is, in our view, perfectly futile—and even fanciful—to attribute to Herder an esoteric project and a coded writing intended to fill in the lacunae that it is only in God’s power to fill.⁷⁹ But what are we to do? What methodological compromises are we to employ that would permit us, nonetheless, to organize these isolated scenes into a totality? Or, to put it another way, what shall we substitute for the universal point of view that we do not have? Or, to put it yet another way, how can we homogenize the materials of universal history without collecting them under a single common perspective?

The response entails the use of four great procedures. The first, that we have already touched upon, concerns the field of inquiry itself and it has to do with *selection*: Herder adheres to geographically restrained history, one that is, at base, Christian. Indeed, this is the same field as had been worked by Bossuet.⁸⁰ But Herder inscribes this succession into secular, Voltairean time. This is why he opposes to the elect people of God a series of peoples elected by history itself, considered as a process with its own consistency. In tacitly eliminating three quarters of universal history, he clearly makes the task easier.

The second procedure can be found in the complex game of *metaphors* that make of this enterprise a poetic philosophy of history. Metaphor is not merely important in order to appeal to the sensibility of the reader; it is also what takes the place of actual knowledge.⁸¹ Identifying the historic course of things with the course of a river, for example, permits him, as

⁷⁹ See Peter Pfaff, “Hieroglyphische Historie. Zu Herders *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*”, *Euphorion* 77/4 (1983), 407–418.

⁸⁰ See *supra*, note 25.

⁸¹ See H. Adler cited *supra* note 27 and H.D. Irmischer (postface cited *supra* note 6) p. 146.

we have already seen,⁸² to speak of continuity without progress and to characterize it as a process that is natural from start to finish, and for which there is no basis to privilege the start or the finish (at least the current finish).

The traditional importance of the comparison between the species and the individual that dates to Augustine has often been noted.⁸³ But if Augustine employed this to speak of sacred history, Herder extends it over all of history itself. However, it is to be noted that Herder only makes use of it in the first section in order to reflect on the sequence going from the Patriarchs (or the human race at about 3 years old) to Rome (where the race reaches adulthood), passing by Egypt, Phoenicia, and Greece. At the outset of the second section we must start again from scratch for there is something "Like a tear in the thread of world events!" (*wie ein Riss im Faden der Weltbegebenheiten*); it is certainly not a total rupture (*like a tear*), but nonetheless, in crossing the Alps we see a new cycle begin—the cycle of the North. Moreover, this metaphor does not merely have the function of helping us think about continuity, but also of justifying the positivity of every era and of forbidding recurrence: if religion is appropriate to the child, school is necessary for the adolescent (p. 489/16), and we cannot ask a child or an adolescent to comport himself like an adult (pp. 486/14 and 490/17).⁸⁴ It is in this sense that Herder can declare that his analogy "is no play" (p. 488/15; *PW* 281): it is, in effect, that which holds together the first sequence of universal history.

What structures this history from the beginning to the end is the metaphor of the tree, a metaphor with clear evangelical overtones⁸⁵ but one that philosophers of history will use in varying senses.⁸⁶ It is this metaphor that innervates the entire work—from the growth of the trunk, concluding with Rome, to the fruit that is to come (pp. 529/54 and 573/97), passing through the branches (p. 528/53) and the foliage (p. 555/80).

⁸² See *supra*, pp. 201–202.

⁸³ *De civitate Dei*, bk. 10, §14: "The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages[.]"

⁸⁴ See pp. 486/14 and 490/17. This was a transposition into universal history of one of the great pedagogical theses of Rousseau in the *Émile*—for example in book II: "L'enfance a des manières de voir, de penser, de sentir, qui lui sont propres; rien n'est moins sensé que d'y vouloir substituer les nôtres; et j'aimerais autant exiger qu'un enfant eût cinq pieds de haut que du jugement à dix ans" (Paris, 1964, p. 78).

⁸⁵ Matthieu, XIII, 32; Luc, XIII, 19.

⁸⁶ See for example Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, 2 vols. (New York/London, 1978), 1:192; Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1952), p. 16.

As for the peak (*Gipfel*), the error consists in identifying it with our present period, and we must read ironically Herder's declarations that the true summit is not in the heavens (*in himmlischer Luft*), but is found beyond them (*über alle Himmel*).⁸⁷

These various metaphors, like others such as that of germination or leavening, thus weave together, by default, what we might call a discontinuous continuity. But in addition to the fact that they can touch readers' sensibilities and that they can make up for the point of view reserved to God, they are further justified by the fact that they refer us to that Herder terms "the analogy of nature" (pp. 512/38 and 521/46): it is perfectly coherent to employ naturalist images once one conceives of God acting in history as in nature,⁸⁸ once the course of providence becomes identical to physical processes. And it is indeed this identity that creates the homogeneity of historical time: because divine governance of the world is univocal, human historicity must be equally so. Herder's construction is no doubt a theoretical compromise; the knowledge that is thus rendered possible is no doubt a partial one that requires the appropriate prostheses, but it holds up—much more so than the exalted and rhapsodic tone of the text would have led us to believe at first glimpse.

Third, we see the procedure that Herder employs to bring together—in a non-metaphorical way—diverse peoples. This entails, first of all, the *functional analogies* that permit us to make non-hierarchizing comparisons.⁸⁹ It also entails the process of appropriation in virtue of which the general spirit of a nation can take possession of⁹⁰ virtues of the people that preceded it. Thus the Greeks were able to integrate the heritage of the Egyptians and the Phoenicians (p. 494/21); thus also the gothic age synthesized the Germanic and Christian achievements (pp. 522–3/48)—but the synthesis is not a reconciliation that takes place in a cumulative manner; rather, it is an "incomparable" individuality characterized by a specific arrangement of qualities and deficiencies.

Fourth, finally, the epistemological mechanism that will grant us access to this individuality is *sympathy*: "[...] one would have first to *sympathize* with the nation, in order to feel a *single one* of its *inclinations* or *actions all together*." ([...] *man müßte erst der Nation sympathisieren, um eine einzige ihrer Neigungen und Handlungen, alle zusammen zu fühlen* [...])

⁸⁷ See pp. 546/70, 554/78 et 561/85.

⁸⁸ See *supra*, p. 198.

⁸⁹ See *supra*, p. 201.

⁹⁰ "*macht sich zu eigen*" (p. 510/36).

(p. 502/29; *PW* 292). There are three explanations for this. First of all, it is precisely an *individuality* that we must understand in this way, without reducing it at the outset to general terms: “No one in the world feels the *weakness of general characterizing* more than I.” (*Niemand in der Welt fühlt die Schwäche des allgemeinen Charakterisierens mehr als ich*) (p. 501/28; *PW* 291). This individuality, contra Montesquieu, finds its spring in an *instinct* and cannot be reduced to its elements in the Euclidian sense of the word. An instinct can, at most, be felt; it cannot be analyzed. This is, at base, an anti-progressive hypothesis. We can no longer think the past insofar as it prefigures the present—for example, we cannot, as Winckelmann did, conceive of Egypt as that which promised Greece⁹¹ (pp. 489–490/17–18). But if we can no longer trace our steps back gradually from the later to the earlier, we must find a way of gaining direct access to the distant past: sympathy is what permits us to pass *over* that which separates us from the past. It opens to the historian the possibility of an immediate knowledge that short-circuits the arrogant teleology of Enlightenment philosophers.

“*Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*”: another philosophy of history, no doubt, but also a different philosophy of history that nourishes pastoral predication by ordering historical individualities onto a tableau that is deliberately full of gaps. Without a point of view, we can only discern the general characteristics of an oriented totality; we must find some other manner of reconstituting its coherence—and we have seen that there is no lack of resources for this task. What we learn from this effort is that we err gravely in despising our predecessors and in considering ourselves to be a finality. We also learn that we have good reason to hope that a finality is to be found somewhere other than in reason.

(Translated from the French by Robert Sparling.)

⁹¹ See pp. 489–490/17–18. In the relationship to Winckelmann, see Cord-Friedrich Berghan, *Moses Mendelssohns ‘Jerusalem’* (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 98–102.

7. GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S NEW SCIENCE OF THE COMMON NATURE OF THE NATIONS

Donald Phillip Verene

Giambattista Vico was born at Naples on 23 June 1668, the sixth of eight children of Antonio de Vico of Maddaloni and Candida Masullo. His father was a farmer's son who moved from the country to Naples about 1656, working first as an apprentice in a print shop and then opening a bookstore that was the least of about forty bookstores in the street of San Biagio dei Librai, part of a system of streets called *Spaccanapoli* that split the old city of Naples. His mother, Antonio's second wife, was the daughter of Giambattista Masullo, a Naples carriage-maker. The family lived and slept in a three-by-six meter room above the store and in accord with the custom of the day meals were cooked on a portable stove in the street. In a society governed by aristocracy, power, and status, these origins are remarkable, given Vico's later success in obtaining a university career.

Vico remained in Naples in both his early years and the years of his university teaching, residing at various addresses in the same area of the city in which he was born. He left Naples only once, when he served for nine years (1686–95) as tutor to the children of the Rocca family at their castle at Vatolla in the Cilento, a three-day carriage ride south of Naples. During this period he made visits to Naples, travelling with the Roccas to their residences in Portici and Naples. Although Vico attended a Jesuit grammar school and was in and out of more advanced formal study, including attendance for two months when he was sixteen at a law course given privately by Francesco Verde, Vico regarded himself as and was an autodidact. While at Vatolla he pursued a course of self-directed study, having access to a good library in the nearby Franciscan convent of Santa Maria della Pietà. In addition during these nine years records show he officially matriculated in jurisprudence at the University of Naples and in 1694, at age 26, he received a degree in both civil and canon law (*doctor in utroque*).

In 1699, at age 31, Vico obtained appointment at the University as professor of Latin Eloquence, a position he was to hold until he was 73 in 1741, when by his request he was officially succeeded in his professorship by his son Gennaro. On his appointment to the University Vico married Teresa

Caterina Destito, the daughter of a neighboring family, who was *analfabeta* and thus obliged to put a cross on the marriage record. The marriage produced eight children, three of whom died in infancy. In addition to Gennaro, the most notable of the children was Luisa, born one year after the marriage, to whom Vico taught liberal arts at home and who later achieved some minor success in writing poetry.

The duty of Vico's chair of rhetoric, besides delivering an address to open the academic year, was the preparation of young students to enter the law. Vico wrote and taught his own Latin *Institutes*. The decisive event in Vico's career was his unfair defeat, in 1723 at age 55, in the concourse for the morning chair of civil law. Vico's loss was the result of academic politics, the chair being awarded to Domenico Gentile of Bari, whose only book was later withdrawn from the press for plagiarism. As a result of this loss Vico felt free to cease writing works in Latin and to write the *New Science* in Tuscan Italian. He had produced his large work on *Universal Law* in Latin in the 1720s as preparation for the chair of civil law, which is in essence a first version of the central ideas of his new science of the common nature of the nations.

Vico published the *New Science* in two versions, one in 1725, known subsequently as the *First New Science*, and one in 1730, revised in 1744 and known as the *Second New Science*. In 1735, at age 67, Vico was appointed Royal Historiographer by Charles of Bourbon. Vico declared that with the exception of some passages of the first version he wished to be known only for the second, definitive version. He was seeing the revised edition of this through the press at his death. Vico died during the night of 22–23 January 1744, at age 75.

These are the basic facts of Vico's personal and professional life. They offer some immediate insight into Vico as a figure living and writing in 18th-century Naples, but more than what can be told of his life in this brief sketch, Vico has left his readers a unique work, an autobiography that offers a beginning point and a key to the comprehension of his thought. Since the word "autobiography" did not exist in Italian or any modern European language at the time, this work is titled *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo* (Life of Giambattista Vico written by himself). It was published in 1728 in the first volume of a Venetian quarterly, *Raccolta d'opusculi scientifici e filologici*, as part of a project by its editors to have Italian thinkers who had made important discoveries write accounts of how they had come to them. Vico is not only the founder of the new science of history, he is the founder of the new art of autobiography. The Vico scholar and translator Max Fisch brings out this point: "Aside from

the light it sheds on his other works, and the interest it has in common with every other intellectual autobiography, Vico's has the unique interest of being the first application of the genetic method by an original thinker to this own writings.¹ Vico's conceptions of historical writing and life-writing are interlocking. The way in which he presents his own humanity is of a piece with how he presents his science of humanity.

The Historiography of Vico's Vita

Benedetto Croce claims: "Vico's *Autobiography* is, in a word, the application of the *Scienza Nuova* to the life of its author, the course of his own individual history: and its method is as just and true as it is original."² Vico wrote his autobiography at the same time he was working out the ideas and text of the *First New Science*, which appeared in October 1725. Vico likely completed the manuscript of the autobiography in 1723, which he updated before it appeared in the above-mentioned *Raccolta* in Venice in October 1728. It is not possible here to relate and analyze the many complexities of Vico's *Vita*.³ I would like to focus on two principal aspects of it: the sense in which Vico implies that the history of himself has a providential structure and the sense in which this narration is a deliberate fable of himself. Both of these aspects are ideas Vico is testing out on himself in order to formulate the method of his new science.

The Italian scholar Enrico De Mas claims: "From the very first pages, the reader of Vico's *Autobiography* cannot fail to be struck powerfully by the mythical and prophetic tone that animates the narrative."⁴ Mario Fubini, the literary scholar and the editor of one of the standard editions of the autobiography, writes: "Vico has given us a story indeed, but a mythical story, almost the myth of himself."⁵

¹ Max Harold Fisch, "Preface," in *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), p. v. The translation of Vico's autobiography is hereinafter cited as *A*, accompanied by the page number.

² Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (London, 1913), p. 266.

³ The reader will find a full treatment of Vico's *Vita* in Donald Phillip Verene, *The New Art of Autobiography: An Essay on the "Life of Giambattista Vico Written by Himself"* (Oxford, Eng., 1991).

⁴ Enrico De Mas, "Vico's Four Authors," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore, 1969), p. 3.

⁵ Mario Fubini, "Prefazione," in Giambattista Vico, *Autobiografia: Seguita da una scelta di lettere, orazioni e rime*, ed. Mario Fubini (Turin, 1965), p. xiii. My trans.

At the beginning of the *First New Science* Vico claims that there are two great principles of truth hidden within the history of the gentile nations: "first, that there is a divine Providence which governs human affairs; second, that men possess freedom of the will, through which, if they so choose, they can escape that which, without their foreseeing it, would otherwise befall them."⁶ This point is carried over in the *Second New Science* (1744) at the beginning of which Vico claims that his science will show that the true civil nature of men is to live in justice in society with others: "the conduct of divine providence in this matter is one of the things whose rationale is a chief business of our Science, which becomes in this aspect a rational civil theology of divine providence."⁷

A fable for Vico is the original form of true speech. In the *First New Science* he states: "the definition of *mythos* is 'a true narration,' yet it survived with the meaning of the word 'fable,' which everyone has hitherto taken to mean a false narration." And he concludes: "it is shown [herein] that fables and true speech were one and the same in meaning and that they constituted the vocabulary of the first nations."⁸ Fables are the means whereby human beings first make images of the world and themselves through the poetic characters elaborated in them. The fables of all nations are not only their first vocabularies, they are their first histories. Vico emphasizes this point in the beginning of the *Second New Science* (hereinafter referred to as the *New Science*, meaning that of 1744), using Greece as his example: "by virtue of new principles of mythology herein disclosed as consequences of the new principles of poetry found herein, it is shown that the fables were true and trustworthy histories of the customs of the most ancient peoples of Greece" (*NS*, par. 7).

Two of Vico's most original ideas, thus, are his concept of providentiality, upon which he bases his theory of the cyclic life of nations, and fabulation, upon which he bases his theory of mythical thought and imaginative

⁶ Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, ed. and trans. Leon Pompa (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), p. 10.

⁷ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), par. 2. The Nicolini paragraph enumeration is common to the English and most Italian editions, e.g., Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, 2 vols., ed. Andrea Battistini (Milan, 1990). In regard to the above passage cf. Giambattista Vico, *La scienza nuova 1730*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini and Manuela Sanna (Naples, 1981), p. 28. The Bergin and Fisch translation of the *New Science* is hereinafter cited as *NS*, accompanied by the paragraph number.

⁸ *First New Science*, p. 149.

universals. Ernst Cassirer called Vico "the real discoverer of the myth."⁹ He also pointed out that Vico's new science is "the first step not only to a new philosophy of history but also to our modern science of sociology."¹⁰ Cassirer does not mean that Vico strives after sociological explanations in the modern sense but that human society must be understood organically and genetically. For Vico the cyclic life of all nations begins in an original stage of "poetic wisdom" (*la sapienza poetica*) or—in modern terms—myth. These themes will be discussed later, but if Vico can comprehend the history of his own life in terms of providence and fable he will have made for himself and others a proof on a microcosmic level of what he will claim on the macrocosmic level of humanity as a whole.

Vico explicitly opposes his autobiography to Descartes' *Discourse*: "We shall not feign what René Descartes craftily feigned as to the method of his studies. . . . Rather, with the candor proper to a historian, we shall narrate plainly and step by step the entire series of Vico's studies" (A, p. 113). Not only does Descartes feign that he arrived at the principles of his philosophy in a single day of meditation, he excludes from right reasoning and human knowledge the very form of literary and historical thought necessary to writing about his own thought. Although Vico does not mention it, in part one of the *Discourse*, where Descartes dismisses from true knowledge all forms of humanistic erudition, Descartes says he would like to represent his life as a picture and that he is presenting this work as an *histoire* or a *fable*.¹¹

In his continuation of his autobiography in 1731, Vico says that he "wrote it as a philosopher, meditating the causes, natural and moral, and the occasions of fortune," and that his intention was to demonstrate that his "intellectual life was bound to have been such as it was and not otherwise" (A, p. 182). Descartes offers a tableau; we can see him sitting in the *poêle*, bringing the principles of his philosophy to light.¹² Search the text as we might, we do not find an *histoire* or a *fable* in which we learn step-by-step

⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History since Hegel*, trans. William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel (New Haven, Conn., 1950), p. 296.

¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, "Descartes, Leibniz, and Vico," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935–1945*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven, Conn., 1979), p. 105.

¹¹ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 1 (Cambridge, Eng., 1994), p. 112.

¹² Regarding Descartes' famous claim to be seated in a *poêle*, see Donald Phillip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), pp. 22–23.

the order of Descartes' studies. We find claims about his early education and reports about his doubts but we do not find a relation of the occasions of fortune nor the causes natural and moral of these conclusions—conclusions he in fact came to largely through his contact with the Dutch doctor Isaac Beeckman, which prompted his intellectual awakening to the nature and practice of science. Vico, however without directly saying so, presents his own life as a *histoire* and a *fable* combined.

If Vico is writing his autobiography against what Descartes presents of his life in the *Discourse*, I can find no precedent text that Vico is employing as the basis for his own. The closest one can come to such is Augustine's *Confessions*. Vico likely intends a parallel between his *Vita* and the *Scienza nuova* and Augustine's *Confessiones* and *De civitate Dei*. Vico's reference in the quotation above to a "rational civil theology of divine providence" (NS, par. 2) is certainly to Augustine's city of God. He repeats this later in the *New Science* and adds that "providence has ordered this great city of the human race" (NS, par. 342). In the conclusion to the *New Science* he speaks of "the great city of the nations that was founded and governed by God" (NS, par. 1107). What the *New Science* relates is analogous to Augustine's earthly city, which is governed by God, but it does not include Augustine's heavenly city.

After finishing the continuation of his autobiography in late summer 1731, Vico signed a set of extensive "Corrections, Meliorations, and Additions" to the *New Science* with the declaration that St. Augustine was his "particular protector"—"finished on the eve of the feast day of St. Augustine (27 August), my particular protector [*mio particolare protettore*], the year 1731."¹³ In the last oration of his career (1737), addressing the Academy of Oziosi, Vico invoked St. Augustine as "the great Father Augustine, under whose protection this Academy stands resigned."¹⁴ Vico mentions Augustine only once in passing in his autobiography, in relation to his study of the work of Étienne Deschamps (A, p. 119), but he certainly presumes the reader will think of Augustine's *Confessions* as the *Urtext* for any philosophic narration of a life.

¹³ Benedetto Croce and Fausto Nicolini, eds., *Opere di G. B. Vico*, 5 (Bari, 1929), p. 377.

¹⁴ Giambattista Vico, "The Academies and the Relation between Philosophy and Eloquence," trans. Donald Phillip Verene, in Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), p. 90. See also Vico's poem, which he recited on 31 August 1735 at the Academy of Oziosi, "In onore di Sant'Agostino," *Opere di G. B. Vico*, 8 (Bari, 1941), p. 117.

Augustine's *Confessions* appears as a very different work from the Roman tradition of *res gestae*. Augustine presents himself not as the agent of accomplishments and doer of deeds but as a subject with an inner life; his deeds are internal transformations that move toward his discovery of and conversion to Christian faith. In so doing he creates not only a new kind of writing of one's own life but the idea of doing so as a philosophical instrument. This is an original, rhetorical step. Augustine's original conception of life-writing is a model for Vico's. Against Descartes' fixed tableau of himself, Vico presents himself as a subject of history. He writes his entire text in the third person, referring to himself either as "he" or by his name, "Vico." Vico thus becomes his own biographer and approaches biography as a basic form of historical writing. He speaks neither in the personal manner of Augustine nor in the abstract a-temporal I of Descartes.

Vico's first sentence is extraordinary; it reads like an official testament to his birth—like a statement declared to a notary: "Signor Giambattista Vico, he was born in Naples in the year 1670 of upright parents who left behind them a very good reputation"—"Il signor Giambattista Vico egli è nato in Napoli l'anno 1670 da onesti parenti, i quali lasciarono assai bona fama di sé."¹⁵ Besides its legalistic tone, Vico's announcement of himself has the sense of stating a historical fact. But it is more than this, because it is false that Vico was born in 1670. The date of Vico's birth, Saturday, 23 June 1668, along with the names of his parents, was recorded at his baptism on the next day for all to see in the parish book of S. Gennaro all'Olmo.¹⁶ Noteworthy also is Vico's reference to his parents simply as "upright," which is counter to the invitation of the *Raccolta*. Contributors were requested to begin with an account of their parentage. Vico avoided this point, perhaps because his parents and ancestors commanded no particular social status, and said the most that could be said, but this gloss is not proper if he were writing an empirical or natural history of himself.

Why does Vico fabricate his birth date? The actual date of his birth, 1668, is without rhetorical significance. The 1670 date is full of symbolism; 70 is the proper age for a human life in both biblical terms and the terms of classical medicine. Vico has put his end in his beginning and his beginning in his end, as 1 plus 6 is 7, his age when, as he reports on the first page of his autobiography, he fell headfirst from a ladder (likely in

¹⁵ See *Opere*, ed. Battistini, 1:5. My trans.

¹⁶ See the reproduction of the entry of the parish book in Verene, *New Art*, p. 178.

his father's bookstore). Vico falls down the page. The fracture to his cranium is so severe that the surgeon predicts he will either die or survive stolid (*stolido*). By God's grace neither of the two parts of the judgment came true, but his lively childhood temperament was transformed into the temperament classically associated with philosophy. As a result of the fall and his recovery "he grew up, from then on, with a melancholy and acrid nature which necessarily belongs to ingenious and profound men, who through ingenuity flash like lightning in acuity, through reflection take no pleasure in witticism and falsity."¹⁷ Vico suffered from what Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* called "head-melancholy," which can be brought on by "hot distemperature of the brain" or "a blow to the head."¹⁸

In the *City of God* Augustine discusses the considerable importance and perfection of the number seven. Augustine quotes Proverbs 24:16, claiming: "seven is often used to indicate universality, as in: 'A righteous man will fall seven times, and will rise again,' meaning however many times he may fall, he will not perish."¹⁹ Vico's alteration of his birth date to incorporate in it the number seventy is in accord with the practice of ancient historians, as is analyzed by Alois Dreizehnter in *Die rhetorische Zahl*. He traces out how ancient writers used numbers, especially the number seven and its variations.²⁰ The number of cities conquered, the size of groups, the number of years passed, the age of important figures are often formed by ancient writers in regard to their rhetorical power rather than with regard to actual fact. The number seven multiplied by ten is particularly regarded as *numerus perfectionis* or *numerus universitatis*. A classic example is Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that he is age seventy and Plato's claim in the *Crito* that this is also his age at his death. It is no accident that Vico ends the 1731 continuation of his autobiography with reference to the death of Socrates, quoting from Phaedrus the lines: "I would not shun his death to win his fame; / I'd yield to odium, if absolved when dust" (A, p. 200).

¹⁷ See *Opere*, ed. Battistini, 1:5. My trans. For a full discussion of Vico's first page see Verene, *New Art*, chap. 5.

¹⁸ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1 (London, 1893), p. 496.

¹⁹ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 11.31. See also V. F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York, 1969), pp. 78–88.

²⁰ Alois Dreizehnter, *Die rhetorische Zahl: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen anhand der Zahlen 70 und 700* (Munich, 1978).

It is not possible here to relate the details of the seven falls that can be counted in the text of Vico's autobiography. The reader must consult the text; they will easily emerge. But to mention them: the first is Vico's actual fall at age 7 and his rebirth as a new person (had he not fallen he would not have become a philosopher). The second is when he suffered an insult in the contest or "diligences" in the Jesuit grammar school in which, although he excelled, a lesser student was passed beyond him. This incident caused him to set his own course of study and to become, in the end, an autodidact. The third is his discovery, on his return to Naples after the years of tutoring and self-study at Vatolla, that the intellectual life of Naples was overrun with Cartesianism, such that he found himself to be "a stranger in his own land" living in his "native city not only a stranger but quite unknown" (A, pp. 132–34). But he rose from this anonymity to secure his university position. The fourth fall was the unfair judgment against him in the concourse for advancement to the morning chair of civil law (foreshadowed by the prejudiced decision in the diligences of the grammar school). But this left him free to write in Italian and to develop his original ideas in the *New Science*.

The fifth fall is the unexpected withdrawal of funds by Cardinal Corsini meant to subvene the publication of the 1725 *New Science*, causing Vico to sell a family diamond ring so as to finance the publication himself. But in order to afford the publication Vico is caused to rewrite the entire work in briefer and positive form, overcoming the very long text *in forma negativa* that he originally prepared. The sixth is the lack of reception of the *First New Science*, such that Vico avoided those in the street to whom he had sent copies because of their silence on it. This was coupled with the appearance of the false notice of the book that appeared in the prestigious Leipzig *Acta*, likely placed by some of his enemies in the University, in order to ridicule Vico as its author and to misrepresent the ideas in it as foolish. Vico rose up to write his reply, known as the *Vici vindiciae*.²¹ The seventh fall is Vico's withdrawal of the manuscript of the 1730 *New Science* from the Venetian printers due to a conflict with them and his suspicions of their intentions as to how the book would be presented.²² This

²¹ See the translation and commentary by Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Reply to the False Book Notice: The *Vici vindiciae*," in *Giambattista Vico: Keys to the New Science; Translations, Commentaries, and Essays*, ed. Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009), pp. 85–135.

²² Vico's claim that he withdrew his work from the press because of a disagreement with the Venetian printers has been brought into question by the research of Gustavo Costa. According to Costa, the publication was in fact blocked by the Holy Office in 1729.

again caused Vico to rewrite the work, which had been greatly expanded. He reduced it to half so that it could be published in Naples. Vico accomplishes this rewriting in 106 days, between Christmas and Easter (25 December 1729–9 April 1730).

One can distinguish these seven major falls, each of which involves a providential rise, by combining Vico's original text with his continuation of 1731. But his account of his life can be regarded in many ways because there is a constant fall and rise pattern in all the events of his life. Seven is a rhetorical number and it can be variously reconfigured to bring out Vico's claim to a providential order to his life. Providence looks over his shoulder and directs his vision. Vico presents himself as the Socrates of the *ricorso* of Western history. In the university oration of 1732 on "The Heroic Mind" (*De mente heroica*), Vico speaks to the audience of young students, urging them to "exert yourselves in your studies in order to manifest the heroic mind you possess," and he says: "'Hero' is defined by philosophers as one who seeks ever the sublime."²³ The sublime requires the pursuit of wisdom which is the pursuit of human knowledge as a whole. Vico regarded Socrates as a whole university unto himself who fulfilled the humanist ideal of wisdom speaking (*la sapienza che parla*), an ideal that Vico said he aimed at in his own teaching (*A*, p. 199). Once the age of heroes is passed it is not possible to be a hero in the sense of achieving the deeds of Achilles or Odysseus, but it is possible to achieve a heroic mind as represented by Socrates. In the fable of himself Vico is the heroic mind of the new polis, Neapolis, as Socrates is the heroic mind of the ancient polis of Athens.

Vico's rival, the historian Pietro Giannone, in a letter of 29 July 1729 wrote that Vico's autobiography was "both the most insipid [*sciapita*] and most braggadocian [*trasonica*] thing one could ever read."²⁴ There is some truth to this remark, in that a life governed by providence is not an ordinary life and can be told only as a fable. But to call it a fable is not to assert that it is false. To the extent they can be verified, the events Vico relates

See Bayer and Verene, eds., *Vico*, pp. 101–2 and Gustavo Costa, "Perchè Vico pubblicò un capolavoro incompiuto? Considerazioni in margine a *La Scienza nuove 1730*," *Italica* 82 (2005), 567; also "Vico e l'Inquisizione," *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* 2 (1999), 93–124.

²³ Giambattista Vico, "On the Heroic Mind," trans. Elizabeth Sewell and Anthony C. Sirignano, in *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney, and Donald Phillip Verene (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1979), p. 230.

²⁴ Giannone's remark is quoted in Alain Pons's edition of Vico's autobiography, *Vie de Giambattista Vico écrite par lui-même*, trans. Alain Pons (Paris, 1981), p. 45 n. 18.

are correct. As in forensic rhetoric, the subject Vico taught, it is necessary that the facts stated be true, but their truth must be stated in such a way that it is also plausible. Vico, who was often regarded as a fool, as he says in his autobiography (*A*, p. 199), and was ridiculed by the cruel, antique epithet "Mastro Tisicuzzo" (*tisico* means "tubercular") because of his gaunt skin-and-bones appearance, pleads his case in masterful terms, originating, in large part, the modern form of intellectual autobiography.

Vico has made his life and in the autobiography he has made a knowledge of his life. His ability to act as his own historian or biographer is the key to the proof of his new science. His claim quoted above, that his aim "was to demonstrate that his intellectual life was bound to have been such as it was and not otherwise" appears in a reformulation as the proof of his new science. In the section on the method of the *New Science*, Vico states that the decisive sort of proof of the science is: "that, since these institutions have been established by divine providence, the course of the institutions of the nations had to be, must now be, and will have to be such as our Science demonstrates" (*NS*, par. 348). He continues: "we make bold to affirm that he who meditates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he himself makes it for himself by that proof 'it had, has, and will have to be'" (*NS*, par. 349). Vico's method of self-writing and his method of history-writing are of a piece. One is able to make the truth of one's self, to attain self-knowledge, only by making one's self in words. And one is able to make the truth of the civil world as it exists in history only by making it in words such that what is past, present, and to come is grasped as a necessary sequence *per causas*. Such is simultaneously the production of both a philosophical and a historical knowledge. How is this making to be done in regard to the "great city of the human race"?

The Natural Law of the Gentes and the Appearance of Jove

Vico took part of the two main terms of his major work, "*scienza nuova*," from Bacon's *Novum organum*. Bacon is one of Vico's "four authors" that, as he reports in the autobiography, he vowed always to have before him (the others were Plato, Tacitus, and Grotius) (*A*, p. 139). The new science was a new organon applied to the civil world of the nations as Bacon had applied his to the natural world. Further, Vico had in mind Galileo's *Dialoghi delle nuove scienze*. Galileo had shown the principles of the new science of nature. Hobbes said that Galileo's work "first opened to us the

gate of natural philosophy universal, which is the knowledge of the nature of motion."²⁵ Vico intended to open the gate of historical philosophy universal, which would offer a knowledge of the nature of motion in human events. Unlike Hobbes, however, Vico did not subscribe to materialism. The life of nations is governed by providence. Evidence for the providential presence of God in nature is the perception of design in the natural world that results from the investigations of modern science, as we find reflected in late 17th- and 18th-century philosophy and theology. Vico intends his science to elicit the principles of humanity as the founders of modern science have elicited the principles of nature. These principles of humanity will demonstrate "what providence has wrought in history" (NS, par. 342).

Where are these principles to be found? Vico's answer is: in Roman law. It is a presupposition of the *Digest* that what the Greeks called philosophy the Romans called jurisprudence. Jurisprudence is civil wisdom, pursued not as a matter of speculative reasoning but as realized in the system of law arising from the original Law of the Twelve Tables and developed ultimately in the *Digest*. Vico claims that the greatness and long endurance of the Roman empire was the result of its ability throughout changes "to stand firm by its principles, which were the same as those of this world of nations." And he concludes: "Thus the cause which produced among the Romans the wisest jurisprudence in the world is the same that made the Roman Empire the greatest in the world" (NS, par. 1003). Vico says further that "all ancient Roman law was a serious poem, represented by the Romans in the forum, and ancient jurisprudence was a severe poetry" (NS, par. 1037).

In the first book of his *Universal Law* (1720), which preceded both versions of the *New Science*, Vico asserts that from this poem of Roman law "came the natural law of the gentes and later the natural law of the philosophers" and that "both developed from a perpetual fable told with innumerable and various characters, yet told with the same grace and propriety of Roman law."²⁶ Vico means that ancient jurisprudence or legal wisdom, as well as practice, originally depended upon legal fictions or fables that were told and retold in order both to restrict and to expand Roman law. Thus, "the ancient jurisconsults made these, not as we would,

²⁵ Quoted by Fisch in A, p. 20.

²⁶ Giambattista Vico, *On the One Principle and One End of Universal Law* (chap. 182), trans John D. Schaeffer, *New Vico Studies* 21 (2003), 197. Cf. *First New Science*, p. 206.

by accommodating the law to the facts, but by accommodating the facts to the law."²⁷ Vico says that lawyers protected the certainty of civil law (*ius civile*) or law made by legislative authority by means of these fables or fictions and from their so doing the truth of the natural law emerged. Because these fables had a coherence, ancient jurisprudence was a kind of poem.

Vico implies that it is not only out of these fables that the law of the gentes (*ius gentium*) emerged, but that this sense of natural law was itself born in the language of legal fictions—that it was a kind of true fable. In the *Digest* we find not only a definition of *ius civile* as law enacted by authority in a civil society but also definitions of *ius naturale* and *ius gentium*. *Ius naturale* "is that which nature has taught to all animals; for it is not a law specific to mankind but is common to all animals."²⁸ The only example given of this sense of natural law is the union of man and woman in marriage as the basis for procreation and rearing of children. This is a sense of law as that necessary to govern the acts involved in the continuing of the human species. No further specific explanation of natural law is made in the *Digest*. The *ius gentium* or the law of nations "is that which all human peoples observe. That it is not co-extensive with natural law can be grasped easily, since this latter is common to all animals whereas *ius gentium* is common only to human beings among themselves."²⁹ Gaius adds: "All peoples who are governed under laws and customs observe in part their own special law [*ius civile*] and in part a law common to all men." He concludes: "That law which natural reason has established among all human beings is among all observed in equal measure and is called *ius gentium*, as being the law which all nations observe."³⁰

What Vico calls "the natural law of the philosophers" in both his *Universal Law* and *New Science* is not to be found in the *Digest*. It is the natural law of the seventeenth-century natural-law theorists, especially Hobbes, Selden, Pufendorf, and Grotius. Natural law in this sense is an ideal formulated by reason that stands above all positive law in all nations and to which such law as it exists in them must answer. But as Gaius claims, the *ius gentium* is established by natural reason, yet is understood as an actual type of law that is part of or common to the bodies of law that govern all nations. It is not an ideal, rational standard to which an appeal can be

²⁷ Vico, *One Principle* (chap. 181), p. 196.

²⁸ *The Digest of Justinian* 1.1.3.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1.1.4.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1.9.

made. Vico's approach to this natural law of the *gentes* suggests that it itself is a kind of fiction or fable that is necessary to the idea of human law itself. No system of law can truly stand as law if it is based solely on power. A system of law must be based not only on power but at the same time on the power of natural reason, which must, in Vico's terms, be a reflection of divine reason. If any two nations have systems of law, these systems must have something actually in common that makes them truly law. Thus the justification of Roman law is that the *ius gentium* is at its base.

This fundamental principle of Roman law is the key to a science of the common nature of the nations. A nation is a birth (from Latin *natio*, birth, from *natus*, past participle of *nasci*, to be born). A nation is a people, a race that is born and develops. What the nations have in common is a pattern of development, a beginning, middle, and end—in the way that any human individual who lives out a natural span has in common with any other human individual—a beginning, middle, and end. Vico temporalizes the *ius gentium* or natural law of the *gentes* and in so doing transposes it into his concept of ideal eternal history (*storia ideale eterna*). All nations have a common pattern of development that proceeds through three ages. Their various courses of development may vary in detail but they each in their natural lifespan pass through an age of gods, of heroes, and of humans—an initial age in which society and nature are organized in terms of gods, an age in which the virtues necessary for human conduct are embodied in the figures of heroes, and an age in which social order takes on the form of written laws and governmental bodies. Corresponding to these three ages are the three kinds of natural law—divine law, in which human actions depend upon the gods; heroic law, which is accomplished by force but controlled by religion; and human law dictated entirely by secular human reason (*NS*, pars. 922–24).

Vico's source for his doctrine of the three ages of ideal eternal history, by which he transposes the *ius gentium* into a principle of the life of nations, is the little-known work of the Roman grammarian Censorinus, *De die natali* (Natal day) in which these ages are mentioned and attributed to Varro.³¹ The occasion of this little book was the birthday in 238 AD of Q. Caerellius, a prominent Roman. The distinction of these three ages hangs by a historical thread. Vico says that Varro divided the times of the world into three: "a dark time, corresponding to the Egyptian age of the gods; a fabulous time, corresponding to their age of the heroes, and a

³¹ Censorinus, *The Birthday Book*, trans. Holt N. Parker (Chicago, 2001), sec. 21.

historic time, corresponding to their age of men" (*NS*, par. 52). Vico rami-fies his citation of Varro by the claim of Herodotus that the Egyptians had three kinds of writing (*ibid.*). These were the hieroglyphic, in which the symbols are still recognizable pictures; the hieratic, in which the symbols have become mostly conventional; and the demotic, further developed from the hieratic.³² The first two were known to the Egyptians as "the God's script" and the third as "the book script."³³ This twofold distinction parallels Vico's claim that the first two ages employed hieroglyphics and heroic characters and the third age invented vulgar characters or articulated alphabets.

Ideal eternal history is separate from sacred history in the sense of the history of the ancient Hebrews before the universal flood. The gentile nations arise after the flood and are subject to the providential structure of the three ages. In sacred history God intervenes directly in human affairs.³⁴ In gentile history God is present only indirectly as the necessary order of events. Vico faces a dilemma—on one alternative there is the deaf necessity (*sorda necessità*) of the Stoics and on the other there is the "blind chance" (*cieco caso*) of the Epicureans.³⁵ Vico regards providence as a way of going "between the horns" of this dilemma. The three ages of ideal eternal history are a necessary course of development for any nation but each nation traverses its course in its own way, such that elements of chance enter into its life. Common to all nations is not only their participation in ideal eternal history but also their origin.

Following the universal flood, the world dries out over two centuries. The descendants of the sons of Noah giantize and wander the trackless great forests of the earth. No human customs exist. They procreate without the institution of marriage and they are without religion. They are *bestioni* or proto-humans. When the world becomes sufficiently dry these giant sons of the earth suddenly encounter a new phenomenon. The sky, which they perceive as just above the treetops, flashes with lightning and thunder. For the first time these *giganti* experience distinctively human emotion. They experience terror (*spavento*). This is not ordinary fear; it is "not fear [*timore*] awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened in

³² Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 2.36.

³³ W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1936), 1:182.

³⁴ On the role of the Hebrews see Frederick R. Marcus, "Vico's *New Science* from the Standpoint of the Hebrews," *New Vico Studies* 27 (2009), 1–26.

³⁵ Giambattista Vico, *Epistole con aggiunte le epistole dei suoi corrispondenti*, ed. Manuela Sanna (Naples, 1992), pp. 126–29.

men by themselves" (*NS*, par. 382). The primal scene of the thunderous sky awakens in the giants not only terror but shame or modesty (*pudore*). They cease to procreate openly—couples retreat into caves, out of the presence of the sky, and form the first gentile marriages.

Spavento and *pudore* are the two civilizing passions. When these first humans became aware of the sky, their nature was that of men robust in bodily strength, "who expressed their very violent passions by shouting [*urlando*] and grumbling [*brontolando*], they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in that aspect they called Jove." And Jove is "the first god of the so-called greater gentes, who meant to tell them something by the hiss of his bolts and clap of his thunder" (*NS*, par. 377). *Urlando* has the sense of both the howl of an animal and the shout of a human; *brontolando* has the sense of both grumbling and the rumbling of thunder. In these two words Vico captures the being of these first humans as both animal and human and as human connected to the divine (thunder, the sign of Jove).

From these initial reactions, which place the human between the animal and the divine, these first humans begin to wonder (*ammirare*) in the way that the vulgar gaze in wonder at an impressive natural phenomenon, such as the effects of a magnet on iron (*NS*, par. 377). Later, as the Jove experience is turned into religion by the fathers who found the first families, this wonder begets piety, which is coupled with wisdom. Wisdom originates in the rites of sacrifice and the taking of auguries (*scienza in divinità*) by the first fathers. These are Vico's passions of the soul. Wonder leads first to religion and then to philosophy, and finally, in the new science, it becomes the middle term that joins piety and wisdom (*NS*, par. 1112).

When the giants onomatopoeically form the word Jove by their monosyllabic utterance *pa!* doubled as *pape!* (*NS*, par. 448), they cease to live in a world of momentariness, in which, as Vico puts it, "they regarded every change of facial expression as a new face" (*NS*, par. 700). Once the word Jove is uttered, the ongoing flux of sensations, in which every clap of thunder and every flash of lightning is a momentary event not tied to the next, is interrupted. What was immediate is now mediated. The giants have entered a world of meaning in which one event of thunder is contained in all the other thunder events. In one sensation the giants can find again the other sensations of the same sort. Once one thing can be named everything can be named. In the age of gods all flora and fauna, all objects of nature, are named as gods, as are all basic human institutions; marriage, for example, is identified with Juno.

The appearance of the first name is an act of human memory, in two senses. The transposition of an instance of thunder into Jove allows the mind of the giants *to collect* all the other occurrences of thunder into a common object. These occurrences can be remembered and held in mind as the god Jove. Because the ancestors of the giants, Noah and his sons, were humans of normal size they had the human property of memory. The species of giants suffered amnesia, as their bodies grew larger over generations, and this sudden shock of the thunderous sky brings back the essence of memory. As Vico says, in the *corso* that ensues, the giants, who are all body, devolve over centuries into humans of normal size with human minds (*NS*, par. 570); they recover the power of memory.

Jove is the first imaginative universal. In it Vico advances a new conception of metaphor. He says that the imaginative universal is the essence of the fable and also that every metaphor is a fable in brief (*NS*, par. 404). Vico's conception of the metaphor is metaphysical. The metaphor brings the object in experience into being. In the monosyllable of the first imaginative universal, "Jove is." Where only immediacy prevails there is now an object. The existence of the object, so to speak, brings into existence the mind that grasps it. The new conception of the metaphor that is present in the imaginative universal is different from that of Aristotle, who defines metaphor as "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else."³⁶ Thus Aristotle can hold that there is little difference between metaphor and simile.³⁷ The simile makes explicit the "is like" that is implicit in his conception of the metaphor; his conception of the metaphor is essentially epistemological, not metaphysical.

The Aristotelian conception of metaphor begins with the two things to be associated as given, such as in a logical proposition where the subject is to be joined to the predicate by the copula. "Is" has both the sense of relation and the sense of being ("to be"). Vico's imaginative universal connects metaphor to being. The act of "carrying over" that is the root meaning of metaphor (*metapherein*) in Vico's imaginative universal takes place as an initial relation in which the immediate is mediated. In the Aristotelian view the name of something already there for the mind is "carried over" to another. Metaphor is the native act of *fantasia*, and memory is the same as *fantasia*. Memory is what humanizes and ultimately educates, for the possession of memory is the mark of education and of wisdom. The

³⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457^b.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1406^b.

speech of the whole above all requires memory, in the full sense in which Vico holds it.

If Jove is the starting point from which man makes the world of civil things, what is the starting point from which the science of these things can be made? If readers are to make this science for themselves by the principle "it had, has, and will have to be," what is the first act from which such knowledge can be generated? This first act of true scientific knowing must recapitulate in some way the act by which the object to be known, the civil world, came about. Corresponding to Jove as the first imaginative universal is "ideal eternal history" (*storia ideale eterna*) for all who would remake Vico's science for themselves in their own speech. "Ideal eternal history" is the key to Vico's science itself, once the basis of the science has been unlocked with the master key of the imaginative universal. These two keys are Vico's double truth that is at the basis of all other truths.

Jove is the product of collective *fantasia*, as described above. Ideal eternal history is the product of what we may call *recollective fantasia*. Jove occurs as the result of a sudden insight by the first men and is the original thought whereby the human world can be made. Vico claims that every nation has its Jove although it goes by different names. Providence realized as ideal eternal history is the result of a sudden insight by Vico whereby a science of the human world can be made. This is the insight that there is a common nature of all nations—that all nations, like all humans, develop by the same pattern of ages. When this insight is grasped, history as a single body comes into existence. It is the sudden realization that history *is* something. "Providence" is the first name of historical thinking. Once we possess it, all else can be "named" in history. To grasp this sense of history one must recollect the human world as a whole, as what "was, is, and is to come." History is memory, but it is not simply memory in the sense of the song of the Muses. The sequence of past, present, and future must be meditated as a necessary sequence, a knowledge *per causas* and then narrated as a truth. History's truth is found in its providentiality. How does Vico accomplish this narration?

The New Critical Art and the Discovery of the True Homer

When Vico withdrew the second version of his *New Science* from the Venetian printers in 1729 in order to have it published under his supervision in Naples, he planned to include in it a *Novella letteraria* polemically tracing the chronicle of the failed publishing venture, which would

appear as an introduction to the edition. But after a substantial part of the whole work had been set in type at Naples he received a conciliatory letter from Father Carlo Lodoli, censor of publications at Venice. This caused Vico to rescind the controversial exchange of letters, leaving nearly 100 pages blank. In their place Vico commissioned an allegorical engraving and wrote a commentary on its depictions as introduction to the central themes of the work. This was printed in large type and replaced what otherwise would likely have been the record of a rather uninteresting quarrel. As mentioned above, it is one of the "falls" from which Vico arose.

The full-page *dipintura* shows the divine eye of providence casting a ray of light onto the breast of a female figure representing metaphysic, which is reflected onto a statue of Homer, "the first gentile author who has come down to us" (NS, par. 6). The dame Metaphysic is standing on a globe that is balanced on an altar in a clearing, with the dark clouds and great forests of the natural world in the background. In the foreground are depicted a number of symbols or "hieroglyphs" representing the things of the civil world of nations. Vico concludes: "the entire engraving represents the three worlds [divine, natural, and civil] in the order in which the human minds of the gentiles have been raised from earth to heaven" (NS, par. 42). It is likely that in creating this *dipintura* Vico had in mind Bacon's notion of an emblem as a concept put into sensible form that can serve as a device for "retaining and keeping knowledge."³⁸ Vico's technique of explaining each element of the depiction is likely taken from Shaftesbury's procedure of using an allegorical engraving with a commentary as "a Noble *Virtuoso Scheme*" to instruct in moral philosophy in his *Second Characters*.³⁹

The opening line of Vico's explanation of the *dipintura* and of the edition is: "As *Cebes the Theban* made of *Morals*, we have present for view a Tablet of Civil things." These may, Vico claims, "serve the *Reader* to conceive [*concepire*] the *Idea of this Work* before reading it, and to bring it back most easily to memory [*memoria*] with such aid as the imagination

³⁸ Francis Bacon, *Works*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 4 (New York, 1870), pp. 436–37.

³⁹ Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge, Eng., 1914). For Shaftesbury's remark on "a Noble *Virtuoso Scheme*" see Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671–1717* (Baton Rouge, La., 1984), pp. 390–91. Shaftesbury spent the last fifteen months of his life in Naples (November 1711 to February 1713).

[*fantasia*] may provide him, after having read it."⁴⁰ In this first sentence Vico has inserted the elements of his threefold doctrine of memory that he presents in his philosophical proofs for the discovery of the true Homer: "Memory thus has three different aspects: memory [*memoria*] when it remembers things, imagination [*fantasia*] when it alters or imitates them, and ingenuity [*ingegno*] when it gives them a new term or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship" (*NS*, par. 819). *Ingegno* is the power required for the mind to form a concept (*concepire*) because it allows us to bring one thing together with another.

What does Vico mean by his analogy of the *New Science* with the *Tablet of Cebes*? The *Tablet of Cebes* is a moral treatise that portrays the course of human life in the form of a dialogue between a senex and a group of pilgrims to whom he explains the meaning of a picture on a tablet in a temple of Saturn. The Tablet depicts an ascending series of concentric, circular enclosures which represent stages of human life.⁴¹ The human figures are depicted as ascending from one circle to another and in the process choosing between vice and virtue, ignorance and error. The ascent leads toward a true education, but few arrive at this pinnacle of human happiness that such education generates. Shaftesbury intended that an image of the Tablet of Cebes and commentary on it be included in his unfinished *Second Characters*. If the *Tablet of Cebes* is read in neo-Platonic terms, the true education that it depicts depends upon recollection. The forms of the virtues are accessible only through the recollective powers of the *psychē*. Because we can to some extent know the Good, we can act in accordance with it and achieve human happiness.

Vico's new science is a science of recollective memory that unites the aspects of his doctrine of threefold memory. Only through memory in the sense of recollection can we determine what providence has wrought in history. In so doing we will produce a divine, rational theology. Because Vico can grasp the providential order in his own life, he can do so in the life of the nations. The *Tablet of Cebes* applies to individuals; the *dipintura* of the *New Science* applies to nations. Vico as the narrator of the *New Science* is the senex speaking to the pilgrims—his readers who wish to learn the meaning of history. Vico states, in the final sentence of the

⁴⁰ Giambattista Vico, *Cinque libri di Giambattista Vico de' principj d'una scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune nature delle nazioni in questa seconda impressione con più propria maniera condotti, e di molto accresciuti* (Naples, 1730). My trans.

⁴¹ *Cebes' Tablet: Facsimiles of the Greek Text, and of Selected Latin, French, English, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, and Polish Translations*, intro. Sandra Sider (New York, 1979).

New Science, that those who would master his science must join wisdom with piety: "it is to be finally concluded that this Science carries inseparably with it the study of piety, and that he who is not pious cannot be truly wise" (NS, par. 1112). But the reader, with Vico's guidance, must make the science of history for himself. History is the temple of Saturn, of Chronos—time. With his melancholic temperament, Vico is a child of Saturn, destined to have a sense of rise and fall, of beginning and end. Concerning the nations, Vico says: "thus from Saturn (whose Greek name Chronos means time) new principles are derived for chronology of the theory of times" (NS, par. 3).

On Vico's view neither the philosophers nor the philologists can provide us with an adequate science of history. "Philosophy," Vico says, "considers man as he should be and so can be of service to but very few" (NS, par. 131). Philosophy aims at the discovery of the universal that is the product of human reason: "Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is author, whence comes consciousness of the certain" (NS, par. 138). That which depend upon human choice are "all histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of peoples in war and peace" (NS, par. 7). Philosophy is concerned with the true (*il vero*) in the sense of universal judgment and philology is concerned with the certain (*il certo*), not in the sense of what is indubitable but in the sense of a fact. To create a new science the true and the certain must be joined in a new form of thought. Thus in this science "philosophy undertakes to examine philology" (NS, par. 7).

The connection of philosophy to philology requires "a new critical art [*nuova arte critica*] that has hitherto been lacking" (NS, par. 7). How is this connection of philosophy and philology to be enacted? Vico gives no explicit answer to this, but his connection of philosophy and philology to the true and the certain implies that the key to this new method of comprehending the world of nations lies in jurisprudence and the method of the jurisconsults. If ideal eternal history reveals the principles of the jurisprudence of the human race, we must again look to the law for Vico's source.

In the first book of the *Universal Law* Vico asserts that "the certain is part of the true [*certum est pars veri*]."⁴² Vico appeals to Ulpian's assertion in the *Digest* that "The *ius civile* is that which neither wholly diverges from

⁴² See Bayer and Verene, eds., *Vico*, p. 40.

the *ius naturale* and *ius gentium* nor follows the same in every particular.”⁴³ Vico says we may conclude that “the certain is from authority just as the true is from reason, and that it is not possible for authority to be completely in conflict with reason, for then there would be no laws but monstrosities of laws.”⁴⁴ Choice as present in the world of nations as the meanings of words, customs, and deeds, corresponds to that enacted in civil law by authority. No law can rest on authority without that authority being perceived as in accord with what is true by natural reason; in other words, any particular law must be seen as a part of law itself.

A second aspect to Vico’s historiography of a new critical art is his understanding of the connection between *ars critica* and *ars topica*. Vico makes this connection clear in his seventh university oration, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*. Descartes’s exclusion of the fields of humanistic study, including history, from his method of right reasoning in effect dismisses the *ars topica* from any significant role in knowledge. The Cartesian endorsement of *ars critica* as the key to human knowledge is embodied in the *Port-Royal Logic* of Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole’s *L’art de penser*, published in 1662. The fourth part of this work distinguishes two kinds of methods of thinking: analysis and synthesis. Method is generally described as “the art of arranging well a succession of various thoughts, or for discerning the truth when we are ignorant of it, or for proving it to others when we already know it.”⁴⁵ Two types of method are then distinguished: “one for discovering the truth, which is called *analysis* or *method of resolution* and that also can be called *method of invention*.” The other is for making the truth “understandable to others when it has been found, that is called *synthesis*, or *method of composition* and can also be called *method of doctrine*.”⁴⁶

Vico accuses Arnauld of considering the *ars topica* to be useless, yet in the *Port-Royal Logic* Arnauld never explicitly attacks the *ars topica*.⁴⁷ The attack is more general and more serious. The *ars topica* is in Vico’s view identified with *inventio*. Vico says “Topics is the art of finding the middle

⁴³ *Digest* 1.1.6.

⁴⁴ Bayer and Verene, eds., *Vico*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ Antoine Arnauld and Pierere Nicole, *La logique ou l’art de penser: Contenant, outre les règles communes, plusieurs observations nouvelles, propres à former le jugement*, crit. ed. P. Clair and F. Girbal (Paris, 1965), p. 299.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 299–300.

⁴⁷ See Elio Gianturco’s comment in Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), p. 17 n. 10.

term (what the Scholastics call *medium* and the Latins call *argumentum*).⁴⁸ To understand this we should recall that in Aristotle there are two ways to consider the syllogism.⁴⁹ One way is to regard the syllogism as an instrument of demonstration, the other is to regard the syllogism as a means for the generation of ideas. In the first of these the middle term plays the role of stating the class through which the classes or the major and minor terms are connected. The middle term is present only in the premises, and it disappears in the statement of the conclusion. In the second sense of the syllogism the middle term is all-important because it is the commonplace or *topos* out of which the other two terms of the syllogism are drawn forth.

The second sense looks at the syllogism from the perspective of how arguments are created, how they come into being, not how they are tested for their validity when they are already in hand. The *ars topica*, understood in this way, requires that the speaker who wishes to assert a connection between two terms must find a third term to act as a middle, a meaning that is held in common between the speaker's intention and the listeners, that is, a commonplace. This can often take the form of a maxim or be formulated within an enthymeme. From such common ground the speaker can then "draw forth" the connection of the terms of the conclusion, bringing the understanding and agreement of the listeners along with him. Lane Cooper states that the sound rhetorician does draw one thing *from* another and in this way "we come to the preposition *ek* (or *ex*), which is characteristic of Aristotle's thought, but often is hard or impossible to translate directly. The speaker is supposed to have resources, *from which* he draws his arguments and illustrations."⁵⁰

For Vico, *ars topica* is required to establish the beginning points for *ars critica*. These topical beginning points are imbedded in the communal sense of each nation, which is a refraction of the communal sense of humankind. Vico says "Common sense [*il senso comune*] is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race" (NS, par. 142). Vico's view of *sensus communis* is opposite to that of Descartes' *bon sens* or Locke's common sense, which are a means for proto-rational, critical judgment. Vico's common

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1354^a–58^a and 1393^a–1400^b. See also *Prior Analytics* 70^a–^b and *Topics* 100^a–^b.

⁵⁰ Lane Cooper, "Preface," in *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Lane Cooper (New York, 1960), p. xxiii.

sense is a primary sensibility that holds all human groups together and in which they all share. It is what underlies *ius gentium* and in fact makes this form of natural law possible. Vico claims that this conception of common sense "will provide a new art of criticism concerning the founders of nations" (NS, par. 143). He says further that "uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth" (NS, par. 144). And he concludes: "This axiom is a great principle which establishes the common sense of the human race as the criterion taught to the nations by divine providence to define what is certain in the natural law of the gentes" (NS, par. 145).

Vico speaks of a common mental language or vocabulary (*una lingua mentale comune*) that underlies the languages and institutions (*cose*) of all the nations: "there must in the nature of human institutions be a mental language common to all nations" (NS, par. 161). This mental language is a treasure-house of topics, from which all particular languages are drawn forth. Vico says: "as far as our small erudition will permit, we shall make use of this vocabulary in all the matters we discuss" (NS, par. 162). Vico refers to this mental language as necessary to his science but he does not as such develop it. It is perhaps analogous, at least in concept, to the system of *pitture* of the Renaissance figure of Giulio Camillo (c. 1480–1544), which comprise his theater of memory. In his *L'idea del Theatro*, Camillo describes an arrangement of biblical, Greek, and Roman images that function as commonplaces to affect the mind of the spectator, who enters on the stage of the theater, and by aligning his *mens* with these images of the divine *mens* can draw forth their meanings and acquire a knowledge of all there is to know and thus attain a complete speech of the world.⁵¹ The *New Science* is a *theatrum mundi*, put in the form of a grand oration.

The commonplaces that make up the mental vocabulary are "sensory topics" (*topica sensibile*). As Vico says, the first founders of humanity "applied themselves to a sensory topics, by which they brought together those properties or qualities or relations of individuals and species which were, so to speak, concrete, and from these created their poetic genera" (NS, par. 495). Thus, Vico says, "the first science to be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of fables" (NS, par. 51). These topics, then,

⁵¹ Giulio Camillo, *L'idea del theatro dell'eccellenza*. M. Giulio Camillo (Florence, 1550). On Camillo's theater of memory see Verene, *Self-Knowledge*, chap. 4. See also Francis A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), chaps. 6–7, and Lina Bolzoni, *Il teatro della memoria: Studi su Giulio Camillo* (Padua, 1984). Vico does not refer to Camillo's *L'idea* but he cites Camillo in his oration to the Academy of Oziosi; see Verene, "Academies," p. 88.

are images or imaginative universals through which myths are formed. By the use of their powers of *fantasia*, the first founders of humanity, the fathers of the first families, hewed out commonplaces from which to form the world in their minds, the first imaginative universal of which was Jove, as discussed above.⁵² Vico says that providence gave good guidance to human affairs “when it aroused human minds first to topics rather than to criticism, for acquaintance with things must come before judgment of them. Topics has the function of making minds inventive, as criticism has that of making them exact” (*NS*, par. 498).

In these first times, everything had to be invented. The world is brought into being as a structure of meanings through exercise of the primordial power of *fantasia*. Only later, in the third age of the ideal eternal history, is the human mind aroused to criticism. The new critical art of the new science of nations thus takes us back to the original *ars topica* of the founders of the nations and allows us to discover mythology as the original manner of thought. Vico says that the discovery of the fact that the first gentile peoples spoke in poetic characters or imaginative universals is the master key of his science: “This discovery, which is the master key of this Science, has cost us the persistent research of almost all our literary life” (*NS*, par. 34).

There is a third aspect to the new critical art that involves its connection with the sense in which the new science is a metaphysics of history. Vico equates the new science with metaphysic: “This New Science or metaphysic [*Così questa Nuova Scienza, o sia la metafisica*] (*NS*, par. 31). He says his science applies a “metaphysical art of criticism” to the founders of the nations (*NS*, par. 348). And, he says, the criterion that this “metaphysical criticism” applies to understand the beginnings of the nations is “the common sense of the human race” (*NS*, par. 350). If philosophy, namely, metaphysics, aims at the true and philology at the certain, by what principle does philosophy establish the true? This aspect of the new art of criticism incorporates Vico’s famous principle of *verum ipsum factum est* or *verum et factum convertuntur* that Vico first puts forth in his *Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, and to which he makes one reference in the *New Science* (*NS*, par. 349).

In the *Most Ancient Wisdom* Vico advances the principle that “the true is the made” as an interpretation of mathematical thought—that what is

⁵² For a discussion of the logic of imaginative universals see Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico’s Science of Imagination* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), chap. 3.

true in mathematics is so because we make it from the principles of mathematics.⁵³ Since the human mind makes the principles of mathematics, what results from them is not separable from the mind. When the mind turns its attention to nature it can never achieve convertibility of its act of knowing with the object known because natural objects are not made by the mind. Mathematics is *scientia* because of the principle of convertibility, but our knowledge of nature is only *conscientia*. In regard to nature we can achieve only a kind of "witnessing consciousness." Experiment is crucial to natural science because it approximates the object being made through the act of knowing it.

The things of the natural world are the result of divine making, which is a "begetting." The divine mind directly makes, begets, what is. The convertibility of the true and the made applies to our knowledge of the world of nations because it is made by men, and because it is so made, men can make a science of it. History is self-knowledge, but it is not self-knowledge *sui generis*. The science of history requires the principle of ideal eternal history and this principle, being itself providence, is not made. As said above, it is discovered in a fashion analogous to the primal discovery of Jove, the first name. The appearance of providence as the basis of human history allows for us to make a science of history, by means of which we perceive the presence of providence in the actions of the nations as they develop themselves.

Providentiality is the prominent principle that absolutely qualifies any doctrine of historicism that one may wish to attribute to Vico by claiming that in his *New Science* "men make history." For Vico, the divine is both in, immanent, and outside, transcendent, of history. There is only one way a science of history can be made and only one way history itself can be made, and that is as ideal eternal. The new art of criticism is the constant application of ideal eternal history or providence to the certainties that are provided to philosophy by philology. The new science offers the remedy for the fact that in the past the "philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologists and likewise how the latter failed by half in not taking care to give their authority the sanction of truth" (*NS*, par. 140).

Ideal eternal history for Vico is twofold. It can and does become a double of itself, realizing itself in the actual life of nations as *corso* and

⁵³ Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L.M. Palmer (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), pp. 45–53.

ricorso. The key to the distinction between *corso* and *ricorso* is Vico's discovery of the true Homer. This discovery allows Vico to offer a reading of the history of Western culture, and if it is a correct reading of this one part of the world of nations it will also be true of the life of all other nations because of the truth of the *ius gentium*. Homer is not an author in any ordinary sense. He represents a turning point in the ideal eternal history of the Greek peoples. By applying his new critical art to what is known and claimed of Homer, Vico concludes that "the Greek peoples were themselves Homer" (*NS*, par. 875). The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represent the summation of the Greek ages of gods and of heroes, the first two ages of ideal eternal history.

Homer is the dividing point between the end of the age of heroes and the beginning of the third age of governments and the rise of rational thought, in which experience is formed in terms of intelligible universals or genera (*generi intelligibili*). After Homer, the philosophers arrive. The agenda of Western philosophy is set by Plato's quarrel with the poets in the tenth book of the *Republic*. As mentioned above, one purpose of Vico's *New Science* is to confute the views of the 17th-century natural-law theorists that human society came about by means of a rational contract or covenant. Another purpose, and one connected to this purpose, is to resolve the ancient quarrel with the poets. As part of his search for the true Homer, Vico wishes to refute the Platonic claim that Homer was a philosopher "we shall here examine particularly if Homer was ever a philosopher" (*NS*, par. 780).

Vico argues that there is no esoteric wisdom in Homer. Homer's wisdom is the vulgar wisdom of the Greek peoples.⁵⁴ The poets were "the first historians of the nations" (*NS*, par. 820) and moreover "it is impossible for anyone to be at the same time a sublime poet and a sublime metaphysician" (*NS*, par. 821). Homer's wisdom is the recollection of the original poetic wisdom formed by the primordial *fantasia* of the ages of gods and heroes. Thus Vico resolves the quarrel with the poets by distinguishing between an original poetic or vulgar exoteric wisdom that is different in kind from the esoteric wisdom of the philosophers. This wisdom precedes philosophy in the development of any nation. Furthermore, it is that original wisdom out of which the third age of any nation develops without any enactment of a covenant, as the natural-law theorists had held.

⁵⁴ Vico first puts forth his view of Homer in the third book of *Universal Law*; see Giambattista Vico, "Dissertations," trans. John D. Schaeffer, *New Vico Studies* 24 (2006), 11–33.

The Greek world proceeds into the Roman world, and with the fall of Rome the *corso* of the West is over. There is a failure to grasp the truth of divine providence. There is no universal deluge or race of giants, but life returns to the forests. The *ricorso* begins with a re-establishment of religion, from which slowly develops the heroic age of the Middle Ages. The medieval world attains summation in the appearance of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Vico calls Dante the Tuscan Homer: "in the returned barbarism of Italy, at the end came Dante, the Tuscan Homer, who also sang only of history" (NS, par. 786).⁵⁵ After Dante, philosophy arises again as a form of thought separate from theology. The Renaissance philosophers accomplish this "new" thought by the recollection and recasting of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This third age is marked by the re-arrival of the philosophers as well as national governments and extends into Vico's—and our—time.

One finds in the Vico literature various commentators referring to Vico's *corsi e ricorsi*, but Vico does not use either of these terms in the plural in the *New Science*. The *ricorso* is not another *corso*. The *corso* begins from the universal flood in the primal scene of the Jove experience. The *ricorso* begins from the *corso* and involves the rebuilding of human memory. The *corso* is the original building up of memory itself, perhaps with some vestige of human memory in the races of giants as they devolve from the sons of Noah. The *corso* and *ricorso* are a pair, a kind of two-in-one. It is left undiscussed in the *New Science* exactly what event might follow the *ricorso*; perhaps the *ricorso* will end in a catastrophic event analogous to the universal flood, but the read is not told.

In the conclusion to the *New Science* Vico says that if peoples are "rotting in that ultimate civil disease and cannot agree on a monarch from within, and are not conquered and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for their extreme ill has its extreme remedy at hand" (NS, par. 1106). Vico says that at this point of civil disease people are turned into "beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense" (ibid.). He says when peoples have reached this point of "premeditated malice" they will receive the "last remedy of providence" and will be reduced once again to having available to them only the sheer necessities of life. They will be reduced to a primitive simplicity in which they become again religious, truthful,

⁵⁵ See also Vico's fragment, "Discovery of the True Dante," trans. Irma Brandeis, in *Discussions of the Divine Comedy*, ed. Irma Brandeis (Boston, 1961), pp. 11–12.

and faithful. Thus providence will bring them back to “the piety, faith, and truth which are the natural foundations of justice as well as the graces and beauties of the eternal order of God” (ibid.). Whether Vico intends this return to simplicity to be the beginning of a wholly new *corso* or of a second *ricorso* is not clear. It suggests, at least, that human history can never escape the cycle. Thus Vico's providence is opposite to the general Enlightenment idea of providence as a principle of historical progress. In this regard, if not in others, Vico is a man out of his own time.⁵⁶

Vico's doctrine is a melancholy truth of cycles occurring in pairs. History is a divine lesson never learned. Vico thinks in terms of fall and awake and fall and awake. Vico says: “Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance [*finalmente impazzano in istrappazzar le sostanze*]” (NS, par. 241). Men not only make history governed by the framework produced by providence but in the making they go mad in history—a rational madness of the third age that causes them to lose sight of the divine eye of providence depicted in Vico's engraving of the frontispiece.

The one principle that governs Vico's historiography is that stated in his axiom 106, “Doctrines must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat” (NS, par. 314). He states that this axiom, that comes near the end of his elements, might just as well have come near the beginning.⁵⁷ To look at matters in this way produces no illusions. It is said that “Vico looks at history and never smiles.” Ultimately the *New Science* is a doctrine of prudence in the great Renaissance tradition of the interlocking principle of *sapientia*, *eloquentia*, and *prudentia*.

In the autobiography Vico says he intends to complete the project Pico della Mirandola began in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, for in it and the theses he introduced with it, claiming to offer conclusions concerning all the knowable, he “left aside the great and major part of it, namely philology” (A, p. 157). Vico's *New Science* is an extended explanation of the civil world, allowing the individual the knowledge necessary to act with

⁵⁶ Whether Vico is sufficiently out of his own time to be the founding figure of a “Counter-Enlightenment” along with Herder and Hamann, as Isaiah Berlin holds in *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, ed. Henry Hardy (London, Eng., 2000) is open to question. See Thora Ilin Bayer, “The Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment: Cassirer, Berlin, and Vico,” *New Vico Studies* 25 (2007), 67–76. See also John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005), chap. 5.

⁵⁷ In the *Second New Science* Vico formulates a set of 114 axioms that guide the science (NS, pars. 119–329).

prudence within it. To do this the individual must use Bacon's principle of "think and see" (*cogitare videre*) (*NS*, par. 359) and clear his mind of the conceits of scholars and nations that incline him to make the unfamiliar familiar.⁵⁸

Behind Vico's great oration is the principle that is expressed by the Florentine historian and statesman, Francesco Guicciardini, in his *Ricordi*: "All that which has been in the past and is at present will be again in the future. But both the names and the faces of things change, so that he who does not have a good eye will not recognize them."⁵⁹ Guicciardini also claims that without this good eye we will not know how to grasp a norm of conduct or make a judgment by means of observations. Human prudence is possible because it is rooted in divine prudence—the divine wisdom speaking in the order of particular events, the jurisprudence of the human race. The understanding of prudence that follows from Vico's *New Science* is highly original. Prudence is not derived in moral philosophy by the imitation of great lives or the study of great actions. It is derived directly from the divine action present in history itself. *Providentia* and *prudentia* are not only the same word—they are the same thing. To see events in this way is to have a good eye and to guide human conduct in accordance with this power of the senses that corresponds to providentiality.

⁵⁸ These occur in the first four axioms of the *New Science*. For a discussion of the parallels between Vico's first four axioms and Bacon's idols see Donald Phillip Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and Finnegans Wake* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), pp. 173–78.

⁵⁹ Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi* (Milan, 1977), p. 131. My trans.

PART II

THEMES AND REGIONAL CONTEXTS

8. GERMAN ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE RISE OF HISTORICISM

Ulrich Muhlack

The European Enlightenment of the 18th century and the historicism that first emerged in Germany at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries were major events in the cultural history of the West. From now on, thought about mankind, previously the domain of religion and theology, was based on reason and history. This marked the beginning of a new way of looking at the world which brought a radically new perspective to the entire range of human relationships. Poets, scholars, philosophers, and intellectuals were its propagandists and so became the pioneers of the spirit of modernity. This was naturally a gradual process; new modes of thinking were rooted in former times, and old modes did not disappear overnight. Indeed, rather than Enlightenment and historicism, it would be more appropriate to refer to the processes of rationalization and historicization.

The relationship between these two phenomena has always been and remains a controversial one. The debate about whether rationalization or historicization was of greater influence in modernizing western thought emerged early on. In Germany, the country that gave birth to historicism, no one doubted that it was the new historical thinking that took pride of place. The rise of historicism was greeted as the victory over the Enlightenment and, at the same time, as the triumph of the German over the western, and especially French, mind. Particularly beyond question was the ground-breaking importance of the new science of history, the fruit of German historicism, which, compared with Enlightenment historiography, was seen as the epitome of modern scientific history, indeed of history as a science per se. Following Wilhelm Dilthey¹ and Georg von Below,² it was above all Friedrich Meinecke who, in his work on

¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die geschichtliche Welt", in: idem, *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes*, (Gesammelte Schriften) 3, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1942), pp. 207–268.

² Georg von Below, *Die deutsche Geschichtsschreibung von den Befreiungskriegen bis zu unseren Tagen: Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsauffassung*, 2nd ed. (1924; repr. Aalen, 1973).

Die Entstehung des Historismus,³ gained wide recognition for this idea. He examined historicism as a general mode of thought, but also sought to set forth the principles informing the new science of history. He of course acknowledged certain forerunners, reserving special praise for the great historical thinkers and writers of the French and British Enlightenment with whom the derivative German authors paled in comparison. Nevertheless, the true birth of modern historical thought, "one of the greatest revolutions seen in western thought," was in his view consummated in the "great German movement" from Lessing and Winckelmann, followed by Möser and Herder, through to Goethe, giving rise to the new "scientific discipline" as personified in Ranke.⁴

The balance started to shift when historicism itself began to become the target of criticism. This occurred relatively late on in the science of history, last of all in Germany, but then with particular intensity. Around 1970, a move away from the historicist tradition gained prominence among German historians, motivated by political and ideological considerations and influenced by contemporary social sciences and by ideas from the United States to some extent.⁵ This was tantamount to a reassessment of Enlightenment historiography. The "science of history beyond historicism"⁶ discovered points of contact with the science of history before historicism. Enlightenment historiography was not only later credited with unexhausted possibilities of historical knowledge, albeit not intentionally suppressed or stifled, but with the very foundation of the modern science of history without which the rise of historicism would have been completely inconceivable. German Enlightenment historiography came to the forefront in this revisionist process. Meinecke had at most admitted the validity of authors such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, Hume and Gibbon. Now all of a sudden Gatterer and Schlözer were placed at the pinnacle of scientific progress ahead of Niebuhr and Ranke. The new point of view was naturally not without its critics, sparking debates

³ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, ed. Carl Hinrichs, (idem, Werke) 3 (Munich, 1959).

⁴ Ibid., pp. 1, 285, and 587.

⁵ Georg G. Iggers, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft: Eine Kritik der traditionellen Geschichtsauffassung von Herder bis zur Gegenwart*, 4th ed. (Vienna, 1997); Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975).

⁶ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971).

that immersed German theorists of history and historians of historiography for a number of years to come.⁷

The exchange of arguments undoubtedly had a corrective effect on both sides, with the result that overall the difference between Enlightenment historiography and the historicist science of history became ever smaller. There was still considerable quibbling about terms, which tended to cloud the relationship between the two. We ought not to forget that the terms "*Aufklärungshistorie*" (Enlightenment historiography) and "*Historismus*" (historicism) as primarily used today do not date from the period but are of later origin. It is important to use them as precisely as possible, but also with the necessary flexibility, namely in their proper context and without admitting teleological connotations.

For this reason, we will first review the key aspects of German Enlightenment historiography before turning to the rise of historicism as a new form of historical science.

No one has ever seriously claimed that the Enlightenment was by definition ahistorical or that history played only a marginal role in it. In fact, the Enlightenment's very conception of itself presupposed an underlying interest in history. Given its pretension not to recognize automatically any received traditions or authorities but to have each examined before the judge of reason, it was actually indebted to history in a twofold sense. It mined history both for those traditions that it rejected and those on which it could build. The Enlightenment thus took shape in a sense by mediating between this negative and positive view of history. It was this tension that allowed it to develop a new sense of the value of history in the first place. Until then history had been, like natural history, the term under which it was long subsumed,⁸ a form of inferior or derivative learning located at the bottom of the hierarchy of knowledge that reached its high point in the revealed truths of the Christian religion. The nature of its task was solely preparatory. The historical counter-impulse of

⁷ See the following collected editions: *Theorie der Geschichte: Beiträge zur Historik*, ed. by the study group "Theorie der Geschichte". Werner-Reimers-Stiftung, Bad Homburg, 6 vols. (Munich, 1977–1990); *Von der Aufklärung zum Historismus: Zum Strukturwandel des historischen Denkens*, ed. Horst Walter Blanke/Jörn Rüsen (Paderborn, 1984); *Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker/Georg G. Iggers/Jonathan B. Knudsen/Peter H. Reill, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte) 81 (Göttingen, 1986); *Geschichtsdiskurs*, ed. Wolfgang Küttler/Jörn Rüsen/Ernst Schulien, 5 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1993–1999).

⁸ Arno Seifert, *Cognitio Historica: Die Geschichte als Namengeberin der frühneuzeitlichen Empirie* (Historische Forschungen) 11 (Berlin, 1976).

Renaissance humanism had been overshadowed in the era of religious wars in the 16th and 17th centuries and remained unrealized. Now, however, history increasingly acquired an importance of its own based on the model of the natural sciences, the Enlightenment's other specialist discipline. A formal "conquest of the historical world" took place in scope and method,⁹ in which the humanistic inheritance was also made to bear fruit.¹⁰ The critical gaze of reason essentially extended across all historical phenomena, which it initially regarded as of equal value or status and which it was able to grasp on their own terms. This gave new momentum to the process of universal historicization. This process was accompanied by a more incisive understanding of the critical study of historical sources, which, building on humanistic foundations, paved the way for an unprecedented transformation of history along scientific lines.

Of course, the most important authors of the new view of history actually came from France and Great Britain, the countries in which the Enlightenment had first originated and where it could flourish in the context of changing political, social and intellectual needs. The forerunners were Pierre Bayle, who, in his *Dictionnaire* of 1697, subjected established historical authorities to unprecedented radical source criticism, and the collective work on *Universal History*, which had been appearing since 1736. The latter's aim was to present a single history of human cultures or civilizations encompassing all peoples, ages, geographical areas and areas of life. This represented the paradigm of Enlightened history's methodical and material programme. These works were built upon by those historical thinkers and writers whom Dilthey and Meinecke already considered the great practitioners of their genre, appreciated in both penetrating and valid terms and certainly still worth reading today: from Voltaire and Montesquieu, through David Hume and William Robertson, to Edward Gibbon. These authors also had followers in Germany, where they were read, translated and used as models for new works. The central position in this work of reception was long occupied by the *Universal History*, which was not only translated but added to. Between 1744 and 1810 approximately 78 volumes were published, far outnumbering the not inconsiderable dimensions of the initial 23 volumes of the original British work.

⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, (Tübingen, 1932; repr. Hamburg, 1998), p. 263.

¹⁰ *Aufklärung und Humanismus*, ed. Richard Toellner, (Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung) 6 (Heidelberg, 1980); Ulrich Muhlack, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Humanismus und in der Aufklärung: Die Vorgeschichte des Historismus* (Munich, 1991).

The entire endeavour was a collective enterprise involving many authors and itself generated additional historiographical output. German Enlightenment historiography was occasionally indistinguishable from it.

The German reception of British and French authors was not, of course, simply a mere copying exercise. In fact, it took place under conditions that brought particular acclaim to German Enlightenment historiography. German historians, like German Enlightenment thinkers in general, were rather devout on the whole and placed great importance on reconciling their new ideas as far as possible with the Christian tradition or even dressed them in religious language. This was practically unavoidable in the Reformation's country of birth and quite different from the rather more "secular" climate that prevailed in Britain or France. The rejection of sacred history was thus much less pronounced in Germany than elsewhere. While Voltaire ridiculed biblical prehistory, Gatterer actually built on it, at least by means of an unglossed renarration. Another characteristic that distinguished German historians was that they were more scholarly than their British and French counterparts, whom they appeared to surpass in learning. Schlözer said of source criticism that its purpose was to investigate historical facts "in annals and memorials": "The Voltaires of this world make up the facts themselves, or certainly tint them".¹¹ In the same vein, Gatterer attacked German imitators of Hume, Robertson or Voltaire as "insects" who should be mercilessly "pursued".¹² Even the early eulogists of German historicism, who generally placed German Enlightenment historiography at a lower level than British and French, acknowledged its preeminence in this respect.¹³ Such a high level of scholarship revealed a kind of academic professionalism that did not exist outside Germany. Far from being arbitrary, this was consistent with "the scholarly, contextual, and systematic nature of German universities."¹⁴ It was attributable to the fact that German Enlightenment historiography was based at universities. This distinguished German authors fundamentally from their British and French contemporaries, who were active in the public sphere outside the

¹¹ August Ludwig Schlözer, *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie (1772/73): Mit Beilagen*, 2nd ed. (Waltrop, 1997), p. 45.

¹² Notker Hammerstein, *Jus und Historie: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des historischen Denkens an deutschen Universitäten im späten 17. und im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1972), p. 369.

¹³ Dilthey, "Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert" (see above, n. 1), p. 261; Below, *Die deutsche Geschichtschreibung* (see above, n. 2), p. 2; Meinecke, *Die Entstehung* (see above, n. 3), p. 287.

¹⁴ Dilthey, "Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert" (see above, n. 1), p. 261.

university, in academies and salons. Unlike elsewhere in western Europe, universities in Germany remained at the heart of scientific endeavour.

The reason for this can be found in their origin. Unlike the clerically influenced French institutions, German universities had always been founded by secular rulers, especially princely ones, and were thus institutions of state. They evolved in conjunction with the rise and development of the modern or early modern state in Germany, acting as training centres for all branches of government administration and with the additional aim of increasing the prestige of the local ruler. The rivalry between territorial powers in Germany encouraged or intensified the latter aim in particular. The idea took hold that every German ruler with any sort of aspirations had to have a university, ideally the best one. It was naturally in the utmost interest of rulers that university lectures were up to date with the latest scientific developments. Nothing could be more detrimental than dogmatic stagnation and nothing more useful than the willingness to innovate or allow new scientific ideas that might bring advantage to the state. The scientific or political prestige of a ruler clearly depended on the state associating itself with everything that was or appeared innovative. Anyone who failed to take advantage of new ideas ran the danger of falling behind his rivals. Care was taken to ensure that the sciences did not remain static and that the latest development was always fostered. It was thus entirely logical that also the Enlightenment, and with it Enlightenment historiography, when the spirit of the age kept pace with this direction, were established at German universities or rather developed in this context, thus acquiring their particular German form.¹⁵

At the same time, there were also instances of historical studies produced outside the university in 18th-century Germany. A few rulers set up scientific academies based on the British or French model, often including a section on history.¹⁶ Nor was there a shortage of independent histori-

¹⁵ In general, see *Wissenschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, ed. Rudolf Vierhaus (Göttingen, 1985). Historical studies at German universities in the 18th century is dealt with comprehensively and principally by Notker Hammerstein: *Jus* (see above, n. 12); *Aufklärung und katholisches Reich: Untersuchungen zur Universitätsreform und Politik katholischer Territorien des Heiligen Römischen Reichs deutscher Nation im 18. Jahrhundert*, (Historische Forschungen) 12 (Berlin, 1977); *Res publica litteraria: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur frühneuzeitlichen Bildungs-, Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte*, ed. Ulrich Muhlack/Gerit Walther, (Historische Forschungen) 69 (Berlin, 2000); *Geschichte als Arsenal: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zu Reich, Hof und Universitäten der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Michael Maaser/Gerit Walther, (Schriftenreihe des Frankfurter Universitätsarchivs) 3 (Göttingen, 2010).

¹⁶ Andreas Kraus, *Vernunft und Geschichte: Die Bedeutung der deutschen Akademien für die Entwicklung der Geschichtswissenschaft im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1965).

ans with a wide readership. These included such great names as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Justus Möser and Johann Gottfried Herder. However, these exceptions tended to confirm the rule insofar as they were formally subordinate to university history. They were ultimately beholden to the study of history at university, which not only reverberated on history outside the university but also determined whether and to what extent external approaches gained acceptance over time. Perhaps the most striking example of this relationship is Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764), which defined an entire age in the history of classical archaeology and classical studies in general, not to mention art history. Winckelmann, who had escaped to Rome from the restrictive confines of German university life, wrote this work in conscious opposition to the traditional practice of scholarship, which lacked everything that impassioned him about antiquity.¹⁷ At the same time, Winckelmann was part of a long-established scholarly tradition at universities and his success was also thanks to the reception of his work there, above all by the Göttingen philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne. His scholarly position depended on the university.

Heyne brings us to the university we will look at first, the Georgia Augusta in Göttingen. Founded in 1737, Göttingen was from the outset the most advanced German university of the time in every respect. The new foundation allowed for generous planning with no heed paid to archaic vested interests. The driving force behind the enterprise was Gerlach Adolf Freiherr von Münchhausen, later its long-serving and omnipotent rector, who never lost the confidence of his sovereign, the Elector of Hanover and King of Britain. He was a man of the age, who had a supreme command of the state of science and learning and who sought to make the university receptive to the latest developments. He ensured that the university was magnificently funded and kept it under tight control to secure the widest range of scholarly opportunities for further expansion. He supported all faculties and appointed either proven or highly promising scholars. The Georgia Augusta University not only became the outstanding German university, but also increasingly a model and finally the embodiment of the 18th-century German university par excellence. The history of German scholarship at his time can be studied through it. German Enlightenment historiography was also based here, with the result that its development

¹⁷ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 9–10.

can be illustrated using the example of Göttingen.¹⁸ It should be noted at this juncture that we are dealing here exclusively with Protestant historians. While there were Catholic historians at Catholic universities, they essentially followed their Protestant counterparts in the fundamentals and do not need to be discussed separately.

The context in which history was taught at Georgia Augusta reflected the subject's origins. History's status was that of a preparatory, ancillary science, whether for rhetoric, theology, jurisprudence, or politics: it provided rhetoric with ancient authors to imitate, gave theology a historical basis, furnished jurisprudence with the sources of scholarly law, and derived manuals for action from the past for politics. It was characterized by dualistic structures everywhere: it brought together historical knowledge for normative ends, in other words ends ultimately extracted or drawn from historical conditions. During the age of the Enlightenment, however, history moved away from this ancillary function towards the status of an autonomous science.

Fundamental in this respect was the role of classical philology, which was closely related to rhetoric. Its then form dated back to Renaissance humanism, which had based its revival of Greek and Roman antiquity on the historical investigation of surviving documents. The main interest was devoted to ancient literature in all its genres, from which the rules of oratory were taken, but soon inscriptions, coins, and works of art were added too. The methodology for a critical and historical approach to sources gradually emerged from the criticism and interpretation of literary texts. The historical perspective of philologists expanded in the 18th century because of the Enlightenment's new relationship with antiquity. Humanist classicism was discarded: it was incompatible with the idea, that, before the judgement of reason, all ages were fundamentally equal. In the end Greece and Rome were admitted as the closest precursors to Enlightenment culture. This represented a twofold impulse for greater

¹⁸ Notker Hammerstein, "Die Universitätsgründungen im Zeichen der Aufklärung", in: *Beiträge zu Problemen deutscher Universitätsgründungen der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Peter Baumgart/Notker Hammerstein, (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen) 4 (Nendeln, 1978), pp. 263–298, specifically pp. 274–280; Luigi Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae: Göttingen 1770–1820*, trans. Brigitte Szabó-Bechstein, (Göttinger Universitätsschriften. Serie A: Schriften) 10 (Göttingen, 1995); *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800: Wissenschaftliche Praktiken, institutionelle Geographie, europäische Netzwerke*, ed. Hans Erich Boedeker/Philippe Büttgen/ Michel Espagne, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte) 237 (Göttingen, 2008); *Geschichtswissenschaft in Göttingen. Eine Vorlesungsreihe*, ed. Hartmut Boockmann/Hermann Wellenreuther, (Göttinger Universitätsschriften: Serie A: Schriften) 2 (Göttingen, 1987).

historicization, which henceforth showed philologists the path to follow. They sought not only to perfect the traditional critical investigation of historical sources, but also to write the history of antiquity based on sources. The normative frontier that still existed was steadily shifting.

Göttingen was the perfect example of this process. Münchhausen had a special interest in taking philology under his wing from the beginning. He wanted to make philology part of the training of advanced teachers, which had until then fallen to theologians, and to this end set up a Philological Seminar led by the professor of eloquence. Philological studies were thus not only given their own institutional status but also a new justification and direction. Münchhausen also succeeded in bringing the right scholars to the project. His very first appointee to the post of professor of eloquence, Johann Matthias Gesner, equally proven as philologist and scholastic, lived up to Münchhausen's expectations. The Seminar, largely based on Gesner's ideas, was soon flourishing under his guidance, with Gesner contributing a number of editions of mainly Roman authors such as Quintilian, Horace and Claudian, all of which reveal a strong didactic interest. Gesner reduced the critical apparatus and did away with long-winded linguistic and factual commentaries. Instead, he aimed to focus the reader's attention on the text by including short explanations written in straightforward language. In moving away from the antiquarian redundancy of recent Dutch and English scholars, he wanted to make readers aware of the author's individuality. His didactic interest converged with a historical one.¹⁹

Gesner's work was built upon by his successor Christian Gottlob Heyne, the most influential philologist in Germany, and indeed Europe, in the second half of the 18th century.²⁰ His appointment had been anything but a foregone conclusion. Heyne had studied in Leipzig with Johann Friedrich

¹⁹ The details on Gesner are from Conrad Bursian, *Geschichte der classischen Philologie in Deutschland von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1 (*Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Deutschland. Neuere Zeit*) 19.1 (1883; repr. New York/London, 1965), pp. 387 ff.; see also Ulrich Muhlack, "Klassische Philologie zwischen Humanismus und Neuhumanismus", in: *Wissenschaften* (see above, n. 15), pp. 93–119, here pp. 108–9.

²⁰ The key source on Heyne's life and still the best assessment of his work to date remains: Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren, "Christian Gottlob Heyne: Biographisch dargestellt", in: idem, *Biographische und Litterarische Denkschriften*, (idem, *Historische Werke*) 6 (Göttingen 1823), pp. 1–430. See also Bursian, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 19), pp. 476 ff.; *Der Vormann der Georgia Augusta. Christian Gottlob Heyne zum 250. Geburtstag: Sechs akademische Aufsätze* (Göttingen, 1980); Ulrich Muhlack, "Historie und Philologie", in: *Aufklärung* (see above, n. 7), pp. 49–81, here pp. 58 ff. and "Klassische Philologie" (see above, n. 19), pp. 109 ff.

Christ, Johann August Ernesti and Johann August Bach, who had taught him an appreciation of the range of ancient literature, the traditional rules of semantic exegesis, basic archaeology, and knowledge of ancient history. He later published editions of Tibullus (1755) and Epictetus (1756), yet remained unknown in Germany, scraping together a humble living as an assistant librarian in Dresden. It was not until the insistent recommendation of the renowned Leiden philologist David Ruhnken, who had a high opinion of Heyne's early works, that Münchhausen, who had long been looking for a suitable candidate for the important position of professor of rhetoric, decided to send for Heyne. As soon as he was absolutely convinced, he proceeded with his customary vigour to secure this clearly promising investment for the future of Göttingen University. When Heyne took up his post in 1763, he expressly presented himself as Gesner's successor only to surpass him within a short space of time. He made the Philological Seminar the cornerstone of the training of grammar school teachers in the Holy Roman Empire and the model for other universities. The classes that he gave to selected students were meant to instil in them "his method of explaining the ancients".²¹ Heyne developed this method not only in his lectures but in various works as well. His aim was to historicize his discipline, something previously unheard of, which for him was equivalent to putting it on a scientific footing: "The entire course of his studies [...] was historical",²² this was meant to give philological studies "purpose", "plan" and "intention".²³

In keeping with tradition, and as Gesner had also done, Heyne began working with specific ancient authors. He had begun his career with Tibullus and in Göttingen he continued his predilection for poets: Homer, Pindar and Virgil. Their aesthetic quality appealed to him, which he regarded as having direct contemporary significance in the midst of a literary world gripped by change. This gave him all the more reason to make these authors accessible in their original form. He affirmed that one should not be content with textual criticism and grammatical and metrical interpretation, a view which reminds us of Gesner. These were simply the foundations for the comprehensive task of historical reconstruction, which, in addition to an exact understanding of the distinctive poetic language of each author, demanded a commentary of all the "realities" in the text:

²¹ Heeren, "Heyne" (see above, n. 20), p. 219.

²² Ibid., p. 198.

²³ Chr. G. Heyne, *Sammlung antiquarischer Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1778), p. IV.

“such a wide-ranging knowledge of the subject as to encompass practically all the disciplines in the study of antiquity”, from mythology and history (in the narrow sense), through geography, to literary and natural history.²⁴ A universal historical scholarship had to teach knowledge of a broad range of subjects. Notes by the young Wilhelm von Humboldt of a lecture on Homer’s *Iliad* from the summer semester of 1789 show how Heyne approached his task. He began by looking at the lifetime, origin, intellectual world and state of knowledge of Homer, mentioned predecessors, discussed the characteristics of Homeric language, set out the history of the origin and transmission of Homer’s poetry and finally launched into his own linguistic and factual interpretation, beginning with the chorography of Troy, all the while never losing sight of the ultimate aim of historical explanation.²⁵

In addition to ancient writers, Heyne also increasingly turned his attention to ancient works of art, which is where Winckelmann became involved.²⁶ In contrast to Heyne’s teachers at Leipzig, Christ and Ernesti, who dealt with works of art as no more than historical sources or aids in literary interpretation, as was customary at the time,²⁷ Winckelmann, filled with an instinctive “love of art”, looked at them as works of art, which he measured according to the “essence of art”.²⁸ This marked the beginnings of the autonomous archaeology of classical antiquity, which Heyne welcomed with enthusiasm: Winckelmann had guided “the study” of ancient works of art “towards the correct viewpoint, towards the art”, thereby “bringing the study of antiquity onto the right track”.²⁹ To arrive from these beginnings at a true science, Heyne considered a high degree “of historical accuracy” indispensable.³⁰ He noticed a number of deficiencies in this sense in Winckelmann and sought to exceed him by applying

²⁴ Heeren, “Heyne” (see above, n. 20), p. 167.

²⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. VII.2 (Berlin, 1908), pp. 550–553.

²⁶ Carl Justi, *Winckelmann: Sein Leben, seine Werke und seine Zeitgenossen*, 2 vols (Munich, 1866–1872); *Johann Joachim Winckelmann: 1717–1768*, ed. Thomas W. Gaethgens (Hamburg, 1986); Ulrich Muhlack, “Philologie”, in: *Aufklärung* (see above, n. 7), pp. 55 ff. and “Klassische Philologie”, in: *Wissenschaften* (see above, n. 7), pp. 116 ff.; Hinrich C. Seeba, “Winckelmann: Zwischen Reichshistorie und Kunstgeschichte: Zur Geschichte eines Paradigmawechsels in der Geschichtsschreibung”, in: *Aufklärung* (see above, n. 7), pp. 299–323.

²⁷ Heyne, *Sammlung* (see above, n. 23), p. VI.

²⁸ Winckelmann, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 17), pp. 9 and 16.

²⁹ Heyne, *Sammlung* (see above, n. 23), pp. V ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

to works of art the methods he had elaborated or refined for ancient authors. Just he practised textual criticism, so too did he practice authenticity criticism; interpretation of the text became interpretation of the art work: the objective was to capture “the age”, “the very situation and circumstances” in which the artist lived, as well as his “thought”,³¹ in other words to offer nothing less than universal scholarship.

Indeed, Heyne did not stop at the historical study of individual authors and works of art but set out from the start to release the historical knowledge collected in his commentaries from this very specific context, by moulding and expanding it into overarching general narratives. The move from philology towards the writing of history had also been anticipated by Winckelmann. His *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* did precisely what the title promised. It did not consist of a catalogue of artists and art works but was a history of art in which individual artists and art works were categorized or subsumed. In the first part, Winckelmann gave an account of the origin of art and its evolution among the peoples of the ancient world: history from “the inside” deduced from the logic of a general concept of art, producing in this sense an “attempt at a doctrinal structure”³² which was inherently rather unhistorical. There were of course also extensive references to external events or circumstances, such as to climatic, geographical, and political conditions. This “external history” formed the second part of the work, which dealt solely with Greek art, the very ideal of art for Winckelmann. He called it “history of art in the narrow sense”.³³ He provided a chronologically ordered overview of names and works and dealt with the political, social, and religious context. The history of art at times broadened into cultural history within a political context.

Heyne was himself contemplating producing this kind of cultural history, albeit on quite a different scale. The universal historical scholarship and learning, tried and tested in the editions of individual authors and works of art, amounted not just to a collection of curiosities of cultural history, but to the possibility of a universal cultural history of Greek and Roman antiquity. He had created a foundation for this in his collaboration on the German translation of the *General History* of William Guthrie and

³¹ Christian Gottlob Heyne, *Akademische Vorlesungen über die Archäologie der Kunst des Alterthums, insbesondere der Griechen und Römer: Ein Leitfaden für Leser der alten Klassiker, Freunde der Antike, Künstler und diejenigen, welche Antikensammlungen mit Nutzen betrachten wollen* (Braunschweig, 1822), p. 3.

³² Winckelmann, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 17), p. 9.

³³ *Ibid.*

John Gray, a digest of the *Universal History*. The first of what would finally stretch to 17 volumes of this collective work appeared in 1765.³⁴ Heyne, who was responsible for the sections on ancient history, "became deeply immersed in history, not just of Greece and Rome, but of the East as well."³⁵ He read about "Greek antiquities" and "Roman antiquities", in other words about the political and cultural history of the Greeks and Romans. He also dealt with specific subjects in the political history of Greece and Rome that interested him in the light of his own experiences in the present. Further areas of interest came directly from his philological practice, namely the history of Greek mythical thought, which aided him in arriving at a periodization of Greek history and, following in Winckelmann's footsteps, the history of ancient art.

It was clear to Heyne that the writing of history had to be based on a historical and critical investigation of sources, that the starting point had to be a solid understanding of ancient documents. Winckelmann, who in his view had not attained this "historical accuracy", served him as a warning in this regard. He was himself so scrupulous in this sense that he barely ever dared venture beyond preliminary studies of source criticism, beginning with his edition of the *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte*. In any case, his historiographical works never go beyond the status of mere drafts or extremely limited fragmentary works. He admitted this quite openly: "I have neither the energy nor the knowledge, not to mention sufficient leisure, to produce a complete overview, although I occasionally catch a glimpse of it; I must be satisfied with publishing a few thoughts and observations."³⁶ The universal cultural history of Greek and Roman antiquity remained for Heyne no more than a regulative idea.

All the same, the idea had now been hatched and Heyne had a student who took it up and transformed it in his own way into a historiographical enterprise on a grand scale. This was Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren,

³⁴ *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte von der Schöpfung an bis auf die gegenwärtige Zeit; welche alle bekannten Reiche und Staaten, ihre Veränderungen, Staatsverfassungen, Gesetze, Religionen, Sitten und Gebräuche, ihr Wachsthum in der Gelehrsamkeit, den Künsten und Wissenschaften, der Handlung und Schifffahrt, sammt ihrer Zeitrechnung, ihren Alterthümern, öffentlichen Gebäuden und besondern Seltenheiten der Natur und Kunst in sich begreift*; ausgefertigt von Wilhelm Guthrie, Johann Gray und andern in diesen Theilen der Wissenschaften berühmten Gelehrten. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt. Aus den Originalschriftstellern berichtigt, und mit einer fortlaufenden Zeitrechnung und verschiedenen Anmerkungen versehen von Herrn Christian Gottlob Heyne [3]. Erster Theil (Leipzig, 1765).

³⁵ Heeren, "Heyne" (see above, n. 20), p. 87

³⁶ Heyne, *Sammlung* (see above, n. 23), p. IX.

associate and full professor of philosophy in 1787 and 1794, respectively, and professor of history from 1800.³⁷

Heeren was taught the essentials of the philological craft by Heyne. His first study was a 1784 dissertation on the chorus in Greek tragedy; then he edited the text of a late Greek rhetorician (1785), explained ancient works of art during a stay in Rome (1786) and upon his return embarked upon an edition (published 1792–1801) of another late Greek author who had left a collection of philosophical excerpts. He had in the meantime, however, turned his attention towards history, likewise following Heyne. He too was fascinated by the content of ancient documents more than “mere textual criticism”.³⁸ He too wanted to produce an overall systematic narrative and it was again Heyne who pointed him in the direction of political cultural history. A discussion group in Göttingen run by Heyne on the sources of the Nile and trade links in antiquity gave concrete form to this interest. The result was Heeren’s *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt*. The first volume of what was intended to be a multi-volume work appeared in 1793. There were six volumes by the time of the fourth edition (1824–1826), with considerable changes in some parts from one edition to the next; much remained incomplete or was never even written. Instead of a self-contained account, Heeren delivered a research process; this happened deliberately and was part of his agenda: “It is in the nature of these investigations that they can never be concluded”.³⁹ Hence the title of the work only referred to “Ideen” in the sense of preliminary deliberations or hypotheses that were to be subsequently verified. This was a step towards the modernization of

³⁷ The fundamental source is Heeren’s autobiography: Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren, “Schreiben an einen Freund, Biographische Nachrichten enthaltend”, in: idem, *Vermischte historische Schriften*, vol. 1, (idem, *Historische Werke*) 1 (Göttingen, 1821), pp. XI–LXXVIII. Neuere Literatur: Hellmut Seier, “Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren”, in: *Deutsche Historiker*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, vol. 9, (Göttingen, 1982), pp. 61–80; Christoph Becker-Schaum, *Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft zwischen Aufklärung und Historismus*, (Europäische Hochschulschriften) III/551 (Frankfurt am Main, 1993) and “Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren (1760 bis 1842)”, in: *Europa-Historiker: Ein biographisches Handbuch*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt/Malgorzata Morawiec/Wolfgang Schmale/Winfried Schulze, vol. 3 (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 63–88; Ulrich Muhlack, “Von der Philologie zur politischen Kulturgeschichte: Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren’s Weg zu einer historischen ‘Wissenschaft vom Menschen’”, in: *Die Wissenschaft* (see above, n. 18), pp. 455–471.

³⁸ Becker-Schaum, *Heeren: Ein Beitrag* (see above, n. 37), p. 431.

³⁹ A.H.L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt*, vol. I, (idem, *Historische Werke*) 10, 4th ed. (Göttingen, 1824), pp. IX–X.

history, which had until then served an essentially unchanged normative idea of knowledge. Heeren was able to take this step because it grew out of the internal logic of his philological studies.

The subject of the *Ideen* was the "constitutions and commercial relationships"⁴⁰ of the "most distinguished" African, Asian and European peoples and the interaction between them. Heeren concentrated on "the period before Alexander", i.e. the "period immediately prior to and during the Persian Monarchy",⁴¹ from c. 600 to c. 350 BC.⁴² He saw in this era "a picture of life and activity, of union and interaction between peoples", a "multiplicity of forms of government" and trade relationships, all of which gave way to a uniformity wiping out all else in the "era of sole rulership by Macedonia and Rome".⁴³ This was admittedly no purely historical analysis but was a direct reference to the present day, for antiquity was to be held up as both an example to be encouraged and as a warning. As well as the general aims of the Enlightenment, the concrete experience of the revolutionary age can be recognized here. Heeren hardly let pass an opportunity, no matter how insignificant, to relate his historical account to the present. He was doing exactly the same as Heyne in his studies on the political history of antiquity. However, in drawing such parallels and analogies he placed greater weight than Heyne on highlighting the differences between antiquity and the present, thus emphasizing precisely the historical particularity of the ancient world. He carefully avoided "a real political theory" in a "work entirely dedicated to investigating the historical course of events",⁴⁴ and when comparing international trade in the ancient and modern world mainly gave attention to the "great differences".⁴⁵

For Heyne, too, political cultural history was the cornerstone of universal cultural history. It was only possible to understand political relationships properly by analysing the totality of a culture, which, on the other hand, would best be described within the context of political history. Heeren shared this view. Just as he said politics was a precondition of trade, he called "culture the result of the commercial interaction between nations".⁴⁶ This was the view of Enlightenment historians in general,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. V.

⁴¹ A.H.L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt* (Göttingen, 1793), pp. VI and 8.

⁴² Becker-Schaum, *Heeren: Ein Beitrag* (see above, n. 37), p. 103.

⁴³ Heeren, *Ideen* (1793) (see above, n. 41), p. 11 and *Ideen* (1824) (see above, n. 39), p. 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

particularly as expressed by Voltaire in his writings. The treatment of the Greeks, estimated at two volumes, gave the central role to “high culture”, following chapters on the geographical and historical foundations, constitutions, the economy, judicial and military conditions, and before those on “colonies and trade”.⁴⁷ The determining element in each case was the “relationship to the state”, regardless of whether the subject was “science” or “poetry and art”.⁴⁸ The first volume concluded with the history of these relationships, while the second never appeared. This single volume was also the only volume of the entire *Ideen* that dealt with Heyne’s general theme of the cultural history of Greek and Roman antiquity. Yet Heyne too had arrived at an idea of the world of the Ancient East during his collaboration on the German version of the *General History*. This made a particularly deep impression on Heeren. At least his systematic concept of cultural history was exactly in line with Heyne’s own.

The main difference between them was of course that Heyne in effect did not progress beyond preparatory source criticism whereas Heeren aimed to convert source studies into historical writing without limiting it in anyway. Heeren collected all the material available to him, beginning with Greek and Roman authors, also drawing on more recent travel reports for completion or comparison, and was keen to include everything that offered further explanation of his subject. When he published the third edition of the volume on Africa in 1814, not only had the political horizon expanded enormously as a result of Napoleon’s spectacular landing in Egypt, but so had the horizon for historical research into that country. Heeren aimed to use this as he would for any “new discovery”.⁴⁹ This openness to new discoveries and ideas kept the research process moving. No source witness was taken on face value, everything had to be checked; the measure was the proximity of the document to the events described, as this determined the plausibility to be accorded it.⁵⁰ On the other hand, “scholarly research” of this kind was not an end in itself for Heeren but simply the “foundation” of a work that was to be distinguished “by more than mere research” and “could attract and keep the attention of particularly the young enthusiasts of this discipline.” In other words, he wanted

⁴⁷ A.H.L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel, der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt*, vol. III.1 (Göttingen, 1812), p. IX.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. XII.

⁴⁹ A.H.L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt*, vol. II.1, 3rd ed. (Göttingen, 1815), pp. IV and VIII.

⁵⁰ Heeren, *Ideen* (1824), (see above, n. 39), p. VII.

to write history while simultaneously enriching "our literature". He naturally got rid of "the embellishments and grandiose style" typical of traditional history, with its didactic and moralistic tone. Instead, his aim was "the greatest clarity and lucidity in the description", which meant presenting the results of "scholarly research" in an appropriate way.⁵¹ Historical research and historical writing became bound up in a new relationship that made Heeren's work perhaps the most important product of German Enlightenment historiography as well as accounting for his international reputation as testified to by the number of English and French translations of his works.⁵²

The renewal of philological studies, of which Göttingen is the outstanding example, also influenced the other branches of historical learning, which inevitably had their own prerequisites for a historicizing transformation. Göttingen was once again the forerunner.

This transformation caused the greatest stir in biblical studies and ecclesiastical history. These subjects had been well established in the Protestant universities of the German Empire since the 16th century and each had clear tasks. Biblical scholars worked on textual criticism and the semantic and factual commentary of *sola scriptura*; the subsequent systematic interpretation was the task of dogmatic theologians. Ecclesiastical historians for their part provided theologians with historical arguments to justify their own religious position and undermine that of their opponents. Forms of enlightened religiosity had been emerging since the middle of the 18th century. Although these left the existing structures untouched in a formal sense, they actually led to the historical element expanding considerably without becoming entirely independent. Faith manifestly lost its traditional transcendental place, becoming increasingly a kind of rational morality that guided the faithful in this world. The bible appeared primarily a source for this intramundane doctrine and was itself largely viewed as an intramundane and hence historical phenomenon; biblical dogma largely became part of biblical history. The same intramundane dynamic took hold of ecclesiastical history; the former sectarian perspective gave way to a more impartial view of history primarily experienced as immanent.

The most advanced representative of the new biblical philology was Johann David Michaelis, professor of philosophy at Göttingen in 1746 and

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. VIII–IX.

⁵² Becker-Schaum, *Heeren: Ein Beitrag* (see above, n. 37), p. 117.

of oriental languages in 1750.⁵³ He took his historical approach to such extremes that he failed to secure the appointment of professor of theology he so desired.⁵⁴ His main work, *Mosaisches Recht* (1770–1775), took as its starting point the exegesis of the Pentateuch. He brought to this extensive linguistic skills and knowledge of the subject, as he moved progressively through ever broader linguistic, social, political, and legal contexts to an overall vision of the world of Moses, which was ascribed a specific place in the course of world history, comparable with other early cultures but essentially distinct from later stages in the evolution of humanity. Where the author might have pursued a dogmatic interest at the beginning, he effectively lost this as this process of historical discovery became more dominant. The revealed Word of God had transformed itself into a word of man constituted by human modes of thought and human conditions and susceptible to empirical research; the book of faith became a book of history, not to be treated any differently than, for example, the written testimonies of Greek and Roman antiquity. When Ludwig Timotheus Spittler, professor of philosophy at Göttingen in 1779, completed his *Grundriß der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche* in 1782, he praised, with scholars such as Michaelis in mind, the theological “revolution of the last thirty years”:

When has the bible ever been studied with so much critical effort, its primary historical sense examined with such a wealth of varied knowledge? In which period of history has the explanation of the Old Testament gained so much from travel accounts, the use of related dialects and an art of interpretation practised in classical literature? When has the viewpoint from which the books of the Old Testament in particular must be dealt with been set forth with so much truth and sophistication?⁵⁵

Spittler learned from this the “true theological scholarship based on history and philology”;⁵⁶ this was the historicization of theology, the merging of theology into history. Spittler wrote his *Grundriß* on this basis.

⁵³ The following is based on Peter Hanns Reill, “Die Geschichtswissenschaft um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts”, in: *Wissenschaften* (see above, n. 15), pp. 163–193, here pp. 180 ff.

⁵⁴ Walter Sparr, “Vernünftiges Christentum: Über die geschichtliche Aufgabe der theologischen Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert in Deutschland”, in: *Wissenschaften* (see above, n. 15), pp. 18–57, here p. 33.

⁵⁵ L.T. Spittler, *Grundriß der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1785), p. 498.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

Spittler's work was the culmination of a series beginning with the *Institutiones historiae ecclesiasticae* of Johann Lorenz Mosheim in 1737–1741.⁵⁷ Originally professor of theology at Kiel and Helmstedt, Mosheim became Chancellor of the University of Göttingen in 1747, where he continued to propound his ideas, including by preparing a new revised edition of the *Institutiones*. He refrained from religious polemics in his work, preferring to pursue solid knowledge as objectively as possible based on source criticism. Instead of the dogmatic history that had dominated earlier accounts, he gave precedence to the development of the Church as a *coetus hominum*.⁵⁸ This he attributed to intramundane causal factors and chains, just as with other human associations, with a major role played by the Church's relationship with the state. Ecclesiastical history thus became an integral part of general history. It was alien to Mosheim to attack previous ideas openly; he questioned his Lutherism no more than his faith in divine providence, to which he ultimately attributed the "foundation and continuation" of the Church.⁵⁹ However, these were theoretical ideas that affected his actual historiographical activity only marginally. His religious convictions and scholarly practice could peacefully coexist without the tensions coming to the surface.

Spittler was not a pupil of Mosheim, but it would have been inconceivable for him to take the next decisive step without the latter having laid the groundwork.⁶⁰ Spittler was from Württemberg, where his political consciousness had been stirred by the conflict between the duke and parliament. However, he initially pursued theological studies, beginning at the renowned Tübingen seminary. The call to Göttingen came thanks to his treatises on the origin of the biblical canon (1777) and the history of canon law (1778) based on the widest range of critical source studies. He seemed to be guaranteed the next available theological professorship.⁶¹ The *Grundriß* (1782) could have served as another calling card but in fact marked a move away from theology. Spittler published nothing else

⁵⁷ See: Emil Clemens Scherer, *Geschichte und Kirchengeschichte an den deutschen Universitäten: Ihre Anfänge im Zeitalter des Humanismus und ihre Ausbildung zu selbständigen Disziplinen* (Freiburg, 1927), pp. 271 ff.; Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, 3rd ed. (1936; repr. Zürich/Schwäbisch Hall, 1985), pp. 269 ff.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵⁹ Scherer, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 57), p. 272.

⁶⁰ Arnold Herrmann Ludwig Heeren, "Ludwig Timotheus von Spittler", in: idem *Denkschriften* (see above, n. 20), pp. 515–534; Fueter, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 57), pp. 377 ff.; Peter Hanns Reill, "Ludwig Timotheus Spittler", in: *Deutsche Historiker* (see above, n. 37), vol. 9, pp. 42–60; Marino, *Praeceptores* (see above, n. 18), pp. 311 ff.

⁶¹ Reill, "Spittler" (see above, n. 60), p. 44.

on the subject afterwards, turning his attention instead towards political history. He left the university in 1797 to work in Württemberg's state administration.

The *Grundriß* told the "history of the Christian Church" from the birth of Christ until the present day. Spittler traced all its manifestations and branch-offs. From the Reformation onwards he limited his treatment to Catholics, Lutherans and Reformists on the grounds that, in his view, the Eastern churches had stagnated after this point.⁶² From one period to another, he dealt with the degree of dissemination, ecclesiastical organization and doctrine of each religion. The entire project was to him "a type of universal history", since he had to look at a number of nations,⁶³ but also because he was unable to detect any fundamental difference from "profane" universal history, with which ecclesiastical history was closely interlinked anyway. In any event, he resorted to the same types of sources "as for any history", applying the same rules "of all historical criticism".⁶⁴ At the beginning of each of the five main sections, he listed the sources and "editors" which he had drawn upon. For the latter he gave a short "history of literature" as introduction. He omitted individual citations to avoid "cumbersome length" so that the "brief outline" intended for both academics and a general public would be readable.⁶⁵ At the same time, Spittler spurned the "brevity of a textbook compendium".⁶⁶ His language was both narrative and reflective.

Mosheim had excluded religious polemics from his treatment without rejecting them in principle. Spittler repudiated them in any form whatsoever. "No part of history", he charged, "has been ruined by sanctimonious and vile partiality as much as this one, which still gathers evidence that is often based not simply on twisting particular passages of the Ancients but on the contrived shifting of the historical context of entire centuries."⁶⁷ He found this "partiality" everywhere, demanding "impartiality" as the highest ideal instead.⁶⁸ Even more importantly, Spittler broke away from any religious "party" at all. Naturally he could refer to "we German protestants"⁶⁹ and did not conceal the fact that he was no lover of Catholics, yet this was

⁶² Spittler, *Grundriß* (see above, n. 55), p. 360.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 and 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, "Vorrede".

⁶⁶ Heeren, "Spittler" (see above, n. 60), p. 522.

⁶⁷ Spittler, *Grundriß* (see above, n. 55), p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

hardly an essential element in the work. Rather, Spittler generally wrote as though he had no devotional affiliation at all. The different Christian religions were themselves the subject of his study. He kept them at a distance so that he could see them in perspective.

This position, which determined the outline throughout, was that of an enlightened Christianity: a "natural religion"⁷⁰ which aimed at "clearer concepts" and "morality", at understanding and virtue, which was essentially identical with the Enlightenment itself.⁷¹ The purpose of ecclesiastical history seemed to Spittler to consist in this religiosity gradually being revealed. This was "the progress of the human spirit" but "with all its regressions and aberrations" and "various shadows and combinations of error and vice".⁷² All ages, all individual events, all individuals in ecclesiastical history, had to ask themselves the question whether they, "bearing in mind the totality of general culture",⁷³ had encouraged progress or prevented it. The work was full of such value judgements. Spittler himself did not recoil from the most devastating criticism. He doubted whether the martyrs of the Early Church "were always enlightened individuals with a morally sound education",⁷⁴ the constitution of the Eastern Church in late antiquity "was set up in such a way that human reason was bound to sink ever deeper",⁷⁵ late medieval mysticism was contrary to "any clearly explained concept of religion",⁷⁶ Calvin represented "a forbidding example of a temperamental theologian".⁷⁷ On the other hand, there had always been bright spots from the beginning, which became more numerous as the present day drew closer, especially since Luther's Reformation, which had awakened appreciation "for exegesis and general study of the bible", and that of Zwingli, which was "even more purposeful and enlightened than Luther's".⁷⁸ Finally, Spittler raised the prospect of a situation in which the "Christian Church" was somehow dissolved in an Enlightenment that had become part of everyday life.⁷⁹ Spittler revealed

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 69 and 259.

⁷² Ibid., p. 3.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 259.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 391.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 362 and 364.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 522.

himself to be the pupil of Voltaire, whose negative view of the "Christian Church" clearly prevailed.⁸⁰

The "enlightened" Spittler clearly imposed a new barrier on history at first. Another value system regarded as universally valid replaced the inviolability of Christian doctrine throughout the centuries. Religious polemics came to an end but only to make way for a new belligerent view. Nevertheless, Spittler's enlightened premises contained signs of considerable historicization. The first was that the "Christian Church" would finally become an intramundane enterprise shaped by men; "the hand of God" or "providence" appeared only ironically or metaphorically.⁸¹ In addition, Spittler relativized up to a point without questioning the dualism found in ecclesiastical history between "progress" and "regression", understanding and misunderstanding, virtue and vice. These qualities could only be clearly assigned in the rarest of cases. Rather, it was almost always the case that the relationships were ambivalent or confused. The "temperamental theologian" Calvin, for instance, was after all also an "enlightened man" capable of "admirable exegesis".⁸² Spittler was also certain that "evil" did not simply oppose "good" but was dialectically related to it. The "impartial historian" cannot "get used early enough" "to researching, within the historical relationships between entire periods, just as again and again advantages originated directly from the exaggeration of certain errors, from the all too oppressive burden of certain evil, which nature compensated for through fortune that it could probably only concede in this form." It was thus "fortunate for the people" that the errors of scholastic theology remained confined to the narrow circle of scholars.⁸³ Even "evil" itself transformed over time. The superstition of the 17th century was different from that of the 12th and 13th centuries, thus showing "the great advances" since made by "man".⁸⁴ Basically Spittler was concerned to give every historical phenomenon its due. Everything had its place in the history of human progress and history could not be imagined without it. A vast area had opened up to historical understanding.

Heeren, who owed "the most" to Spittler after Heyne,⁸⁵ considered the *Grundriß* "the true fruit of his mind", stressing that the author had "for

⁸⁰ Fueter, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 57), pp. 378–79.

⁸¹ Spittler, *Grundriß* (see above, n. 55), pp. 36 and 70.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 353–54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Heeren, "Schreiben" (see above, n. 37), pp. XXIII–XXIV.

the first time approached ecclesiastical history not as a theologian but purely as a historian".⁸⁶ It could be added that the "theologian" had himself become an "historian". The previous relationship between theology and ecclesiastical history appeared to have been turned upside down. At least ecclesiastical history had achieved a degree of independence through this work unique among German Enlightenment historians. It is therefore understandable that Spittler never occupied a theological post afterwards.

When Spittler decided to dedicate himself henceforth to political history, he entered a field in which history had quite a different role to fulfil, namely as an auxiliary discipline to jurisprudence. There was an entire body of auxiliary knowledge designed to teach the historical foundations of contemporary law, the need for which arose after the Thirty Years War. The complexity of the new legal relationships highlighted the fact that it was no longer sufficient to refer to an abstract system of legal concepts such as the *jus commune* of Roman law but that much could only be understood by tracing their history. In addition to disciplines such as diplomatics, numismatics and heraldry, which were to practice the methodologically correct treatment of the relevant types of sources, other specialist disciplines dealt with certain types of legal material. The most important of these were those dealing with the history of public law: the history of the Holy Roman Empire, the history of the German territories, and the history of European states. Just as one would investigate the interactions between law and other factors, legal history extended into political history and indeed cultural history. Everything was aimed at using history to demonstrate the particularity of the present legal state of affairs. The University of Halle, founded in 1694, was the first to establish this curriculum.⁸⁷

The Enlightenment gave further momentum to the historicization of each of these three areas. Its reinvigorated study of natural law gave rise to a *jus publicum universale*, a universal public law that was not intended to stifle or replace positive law, that is, law that had become historical, but to deliver a somewhat formal or categorical framework for its assessment.⁸⁸ A set of criteria that described very generally the main aspects or problems of state organization served the comparative study of

⁸⁶ Heeren, "Spittler" (see above, n. 60), pp. 520 and 522.

⁸⁷ Hammerstein, *Jus* (see above, n. 12) remains unsurpassed on this entire subject.

⁸⁸ See Michael Stolleis, *Geschichte des öffentlichen Rechts in Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1988), pp. 291 ff.

contemporary constitutions, whose historically determined particularity was to be defined with the greatest possible precision. The prescriptive character of natural law clearly still resonated in this undertaking but in the final instance the decisive element was the historical assessment, which rapidly, at least in practice, became an end in itself. In this instance, too, a process of ever greater autonomy was underway in which once again Göttingen can be studied as exemplary.

One of the greatest exponents of the history of Holy Roman Empire was Johann Stephan Pütter, professor of constitutional law at Georgia Augusta since 1757, and certainly the most well known representative in the field at the time, having published continually on German imperial history over many decades. His books, solely intended for academic use and often appearing in various editions, could hardly be distinguished from one another in their overall layout and language; it was only necessary to read one of them to get an idea of Pütter's approach. The best representative for an overall appraisal of his work is a late publication, the seventh edition of the *Grundriß der Staatsveränderungen des Teutschen Reichs*, which appeared in 1795 but which had first been published in 1753.⁸⁹ The preface included an overview of Pütter's previous works on the history of the German Empire in chronological order,⁹⁰ in effect a research report on his own work.

The work's purpose was set out in the very first sentence, namely "to explore in detail [...] the present-day condition of the German Empire" by going back "to previous centuries".⁹¹ This step into the past was necessary because the current constitution of the Empire differed fundamentally from that of other states and its uniqueness could be construed solely on the basis of historical reconstruction. Pütter considered that knowledge of "the present-day condition" of other states could also only be gained in this way. Each individual state was like an individual person formed by particular historical circumstances; constitutional theory evolved into constitutional history. Pütter began with "the very singular constitution of the German Empire as body politic made up of a number of extremely varied states", which had been shaped into a duality between the emperor and the imperial estates.⁹² History would show how this "condition" had

⁸⁹ Pütter, *Grundriß der Staatsveränderungen des Teutschen Reichs*, 7th ed. (Göttingen, 1795).

⁹⁰ See also Stolleis, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 88), pp. 34 and 315.

⁹¹ Pütter, *Grundriß* (see above, n. 89), p. 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

come about. Neither the findings nor the interest in them were exactly new, in fact dating back to the beginnings of imperial history in Halle. What was new, however, was the fact that Pütter avoided anything that resembled a direct equivalence between past and present. He saw the present "condition" much more as the result of a long historical process that consisted of various stages or "constitutional developments". Only the problem of the correct relationship between centrality and particularity remained. It seemed that this had first been exposed at the time of Arminius, who had had to deal with "the internal wars among the Germans" following his victory over the Romans.⁹³ The first equilibrium was achieved under Clovis and next again under Charlemagne.⁹⁴ So it continued over the centuries until the development into a formal constitutional state took place "with the Golden Bull as the first imperial constitution",⁹⁵ although the state had to pass through many stages to reach finally its "present-day condition". The book was divided into the main periods in these "constitutional developments", which were in turn subdivided according to kings and emperors since the foundation of the Frankish Empire. Pütter first recounted the political and military history before dealing with constitutional relations. He still found room for brief excursions into "trade and commerce", "customs and coinage", "art and science", and "language and scholarship".⁹⁶ A general German history began to take shape in these sections built around the history of the Empire. Pütter listed the sources and literature, often entering into long commentaries on them. The discussion was utterly focussed on the historical context, so much so that even the all-important reference to the present day occasionally disappeared from view.

The history of the German territories, the second of the auxiliary disciplines to jurisprudence under discussion, was closely connected to the history of the German Empire. The present-day constitution of the Empire was largely shaped by the "number of extremely varied states" (to cite Pütter again) from which it was made up, and consequently imperial history also had to refer to the history of their rise. Pütter explained the growing independence of ecclesiastical and lay imperial estates as an essential feature of constitutional imperial history.⁹⁷ He naturally only dealt

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33 and 48 ff.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 57 and 156.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

with the history of those German “states” that had a particular relationship to the Empire’s “general trends”,⁹⁸ without, however, denying the others, which he simply mentioned, their potential place in the overall process. The history of the German territories was thus rooted in the history of the German Empire. It developed in this context and followed the same methodology.

In the *Grundriß*, Pütter complained that the study of the German “states” had been previously neglected, before going on to list those accounts that would “also be extremely useful in the history of the Empire”.⁹⁹ Two works by Spittler were cited towards the end of the chronological overview: the histories of Württemberg and Hanover published in 1783 and 1786 respectively. German territorial history during the Enlightenment reached its highpoint in these texts, in part because of their literary quality, which most such publications lacked. Pütter wrote textbooks, Spittler wrote history, just as he had previously in his work on ecclesiastical history. In this respect, too, he was Heeren’s teacher.

Spittler had come from Württemberg to Göttingen but without cutting ties to his place of origin. His choice of subject in writing these territorial histories was therefore anything but arbitrary. Nonetheless, these works were not sycophantic eulogies of either Württemberg or Hanover. On the contrary, Spittler was highly critical of the “flatteries” of conventional dynastic history. Rather than a “wonderful historical epic” in which everything happened as though “perfectly ordained”, he wanted to bring out “the truth”.¹⁰⁰ It must be admitted that while he certainly did not spare the rulers of Württemberg and Hanover, he did in fact end the history of Württemberg in 1733 and Hanover in 1698. The subject in both cases was “the development of the internal constitution”,¹⁰¹ the history of the “constitutional state under which we ourselves live”¹⁰² through a combination of “constitution and customs”.¹⁰³ It was, in other words, rooted in a universal cultural history plotted across the axis of political history and divided by the governments of the princely rulers. Spittler’s guiding idea

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

¹⁰⁰ L.T. Spittler, *Geschichte Wirtembergs unter der Regierung der Grafen und Herzoge* (Göttingen, 1783), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁰² L.T. Spittler, *Geschichte des Fürstenthums Hannover seit den Zeiten der Reformation bis zum Ende des siebenzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols (Göttingen, 1786), here vol. 2, “Vorrede”.

¹⁰³ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 6–7.

was a state organization in which the prince and the estates formed a well-balanced whole. Other reference points were the share in imperial affairs and relations with European states. The development measured by Spittler based on these criteria bore the characteristics of an educational process classed as a history of progress "of the entire social condition" or "of a social culture".¹⁰⁴ When he dealt with the conflicts between the German princes in the Later Middle Ages, he believed he could "glimpse a throng of pupils".¹⁰⁵ History still had a difficult pedagogical task to solve in this sense. Spittler paid a lot of attention to everyday life, the forms of economic production, eating and drinking habits, fashion, but also education. The *Geschichte Württembergs* also included a brief history of the Tübingen seminary. The author thus took up some of the common themes of Enlightenment historical writing, once again proving to be a faithful follower of Voltaire.

What was even more significant, however, was the fact that these criteria and themes did not veer into the doctrinal at any point. The guiding idea of a "constitutional state" did not prevent Spittler from dealing with specific constitutional relationships and their immediate causes. Württemberg and Hanover may have aspired towards the same constitutional condition but diverged so starkly from each other in the process that the emphasis had to be first and foremost on the differences. It had to be made clear "how much from the beginning everything had developed freely in its own way, how chance and nature in all their diversity played a part".¹⁰⁶ One should not expect "the evolution of a subtle historical plan".¹⁰⁷ The process of change began unconsciously, as it were, only gradually reaching the stage of conscious decision-making, thereafter not always continuing in a straight line but encountering setbacks, dead ends and diversions. Spittler was forever finding transformations: "another world, other men, other customs".¹⁰⁸ Württemberg underwent major "changes" in the Later Middle Ages, when the "majority of the country", the "state constitution, the internal condition" had "changed considerably".¹⁰⁹ Something similar occurred in Hanover, where "everything in the entire country changed, the earth itself hardly seemed to be the same, not to mention the people

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 12–13 and 28.

¹⁰⁵ Spittler, *Geschichte Württembergs* (see above, n. 100), p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ Spittler, *Hannover* (see above, n. 102), vol. 1, pp. 4–5.

¹⁰⁷ Spittler, *Geschichte Württembergs* (see above, n. 100), p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Spittler, *Hannover* (see above, n. 102), vol. 1, p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ Spittler, *Geschichte Württembergs* (see above, n. 100), p. 68.

and [their] entire social constitution".¹¹⁰ Yet the author also paid attention to continuities. He noted that "recognizable features in constitution and customs could still be preserved at the same time as completely changed external forms, just as some of the features of youthful physiognomy could be found in the face of a mature man".¹¹¹ He pursued "what could be saved in such completely changed times and prevailing legal principles".¹¹² He sought to capture the "spirit" "in which the constitution had formerly been founded, the institutions set up."¹¹³ Old and new did not remain separate but gave rise to a number of paradoxical situations. Spittler referred to "overhauled antiquity"¹¹⁴ or admitted "the strangest mix of old and new".¹¹⁵ Only historical knowledge could assist with such phenomena, and this in turn could only be obtained from the sources, which Spittler had at his disposal in great quantities. For Württemberg he drew on a printed collection of documents and for Hanover on unpublished archives, not without thoroughly checking their reliability. His scepticism was aroused particularly in the case of the most remote history. In the *Geschichte Württembergs*, he berated the humanist historian Johannes Nauclerus, as his "almost every word" about early Württemberg "was riddled with error," and Spittler admitted that even he could not get beyond "juggling with hypotheses" for the time being.¹¹⁶ This marked once and for all the wide gap that separated Enlightenment historiography, at least in its mature form, from humanist historical writing, even while admitting that the latter had paved the way for the former.

It is of course impossible in a discussion of German regional history during the Enlightenment not to mention the *Osnabrückische Geschichte* published by Justus Möser in 1768. Like Winckelmann and Herder, he was one of those historical writers who was active outside the university. They were long considered groundbreaking for this reason, exalted by Dilthey as "natural originals", "who had raised themselves above the narrow confines of their German circumstances",¹¹⁷ by which he meant that they appeared to be free from the pedantic routine of university life from the beginning. He saw Möser as "a solitary great" who had created

¹¹⁰ Spittler, *Hannover* (see above, n. 102), vol. 1, p. 115.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5 ff.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, "Vorrede".

¹¹⁴ Spittler, *Geschichte Württembergs* (see above, n. 100), p. 71.

¹¹⁵ Spittler, *Hannover* (see above, n. 102), vol. 1, p. 221.

¹¹⁶ Spittler, *Geschichte Württembergs* (see above, n. 100), "Beylagen", pp. 64–65 and 84.

¹¹⁷ Dilthey, "Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert" (see above, n. 1), p. 247.

“an entirely new view of historical phenomena”, thereby representing the “beginning of the historical school”.¹¹⁸ Meinecke identified a “gulf” separating Möser from Enlightenment historiography and anointed him the “pioneer of historicism”.¹¹⁹ Without in any way calling into question his achievements in historiography, Möser has since been reclaimed for his time, so to speak, with the result that his relationship to the university in particular has become clearer.¹²⁰ Möser studied law at Göttingen from 1740 to 1742, where he became familiar with imperial history from a legal perspective, which was taught at the time by Georg Christian Gebauer, Johann Jacob Schmauß and Johann David Köhler.¹²¹ The *Osnabrückische Geschichte* built on this foundation as “a legal and social” history of the region¹²² in which the tradition of imperial history was presented thematically and methodologically. There was no fundamental difference from Spittler’s territorial histories of Württemberg and Hanover. Even the historiographical quality is not dissimilar, if one overlooks the fact that he lacked the thorough scholarly basis in source criticism.¹²³ The *Osnabrückische Geschichte* was listed in Pütter’s bibliography of regional history,¹²⁴ a further sign that it “belonged there”. It is also worth noting that Johannes von Müller’s *Geschichten der Schweizer* (1780) dated back to the author’s time as a student at Göttingen. One of his teachers was August Ludwig Schlözer, who likewise approached history from a political and constitutional perspective.¹²⁵

The history of the German Empire told the history of the *jus publicum Romano-Germanicum*; the history of the German territories that of each

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 248, 250 and 256.

¹¹⁹ Meinecke, *Die Entstehung* (see above, n. 3), pp. 313 and 354.

¹²⁰ See: Carlo Antoni, *Der Kampf wider die Vernunft: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des deutschen Freiheitsgedankens*, trans. Walter Goetz (Stuttgart, 1951), pp. 101 and 150–51; Jonathan B. Knudsen, “Justus Möser: Local History as Cosmopolitan History”, in: *Aufklärung* (see above, n. 7), pp. 324–343; Notker Hammerstein, “Justus Möser und die Reichs-Publicistik”, in: *Geschichte als Arsenal* (see above, n. 15), pp. 284–302.

¹²¹ On these, see Hammerstein, *Jus* (see above, n. 12), pp. 332–356.

¹²² Antoni, *Der Kampf* (see above, n. 120), p. 149.

¹²³ Meinecke, *Die Entstehung* (see above, n. 3), pp. 331–32.

¹²⁴ Pütter, *Grundriß* (see above, n. 89), p. 9.

¹²⁵ On Müller: Johannes von Müller—*Geschichtschreiber der Goethezeit*, ed. Christoph Jamme/Otto Pöggeler (Schaffhausen, 1986); Michael Gottlob, *Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Aufklärung und Historismus. Johannes von Müller und Friedrich Christoph Schlosser*, (Europäische Hochschulschriften) III/385 (Frankfurt am Main, 1989); *Geschichtsschreibung zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts im Umkreis Johannes von Müllers und des Groupe de Coppet. L’Historiographie à l’aube du XIX^e siècle autour de Jean de Müller et du Groupe de Coppet*, ed. Konqui/Berlinger (Paris, 2004).

jus territoriale. The subject of the history of European states was the origin of the *jus publicum Europaeum* understood in a twofold sense as the public law of each European state and as international law. So there were two kinds of history: the study of individual European countries and the history of the European state system. European country studies looked at individual states in unconnected sequence. It combined a historical outline with a description of the prevailing constitution, with the aim of a comprehensive "statistical" assessment and, in addition to a description of the political system, included observations on geographical location, population size, national character, economic potential, the state of government finances, military strength, and foreign relations. It is possible to recognize once again the methodological model of imperial history. The German Empire itself, albeit briefly, was often incorporated into these country studies. The history of the European state system, on the other hand, dealt with the relations between states as divided into the main periods in the history of international relations. The history of war and diplomacy predominated but appeared in the wider perspective of general cultural history and was subordinate to the overriding idea of gradually establishing the principles and rules of international law. There were naturally points of contact between the two types of history: the history of European states did not ignore international relations nor did the history of the European state system overlook the domestic situation in individual states. The interaction between domestic and foreign politics was the normal state of affairs.

These subjects also flourished in Göttingen. Once again we come across two very familiar names, Spittler and Heeren. The former worked on the study of European countries and the latter on the history of the European state system.

Spittler's *Entwurf der Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten*, published 1793–94, was the closest he ever came to publishing the type of compendium used in university teaching. He occasionally even confined himself to nothing more than keywords or questions whose explanation was reserved for the relevant lecture. However, there was still plenty of room for more elaborated sections and it was possible to identify a historiographical concept even where Spittler confined himself to only the briefest of remarks. He described all European states existing at the time, one after the other from Spain through to Denmark, except for the Empire and the German territories, but including the German rulers of possessions such as Hungary and Prussia (in the strict sense of the original territory of the military order) that were not part of the Empire. The Ottoman Empire

was, without any reserve, also included. Spittler was writing under the immediate influence of the French Revolution, which was already well advanced. He thus made the development of the constitution in each state the main subject, without completely neglecting other factors, and paid particular attention to "how a third estate had come into existence".¹²⁶ Everything "statistical", which had previously been particular to the study of European countries, took second place behind the dynamic of historical change. The present, gripped in the process of enormous change, brought keener understanding of changes in the past, as had already been the case in Spittler's regional histories. The prime example of this increased historicization was of course the description of France.¹²⁷ The treatment began with the "conquest of the Franks",¹²⁸ the foundation and history of the Frankish Empire, medieval conflicts between the central monarchy and the estates, the establishment in the early modern period of "unrelenting despotism",¹²⁹ the subsequent failure "of the old state administration, securely entrenched as a result of a number of chance circumstances", which had concealed merely the "appearance of unlimited monarchy",¹³⁰ continuing right up to the revolution, which brought about the complete "collapse of the previous constitution of the empire in all its facets" and had placed in power a "wild faction of mob rule".¹³¹ Spittler left no doubt that he could approve of neither the "despotic" nor the "mob" constitution, although he found "the naked practice of a new type of international law", which he encountered in the partitions of Poland, much worse than the "horrific effects of the principles of mob rule".¹³² Such judgements did not, however, preclude the attempt at careful investigation of the historical facts, which, just as elsewhere, Spittler drew from his critical source research.

In 1809, Heeren published a *Handbuch der Geschichte des Europäischen Staatensystems*, which complemented Spittler's work to a certain extent. The individual European states, which Spittler had presented in isolated sequence, now came into interaction with one another. Heeren did occasionally incorporate "sections on individual states" but only insofar as

¹²⁶ Spittler, *Entwurf der Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1793/94), here vol. 1, "Vorrede".

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 134–276.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 234–35.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 267–68.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 274–75.

¹³² Ibid., vol. 2, "Vorrede".

this seemed necessary to understand “the general history”.¹³³ He began towards the end of the 15th century and continued his account until the recent past. The division into “periods” and “sub-periods” was based overall on the main events in the history of international relations. What distinguished Heeren from earlier authors in the field was the particular emphasis that he placed on the overseas dimension in European politics, “which was linked to the course of world trade” and in turn exercised “untold influence on politics”.¹³⁴ However, he also occasionally brought to bear additional or interrelated factors: the “interconnection between religion and politics”, “the interconnection of financial interests with politics”, the “influence” of “writers”, the “indissoluble bond between morals and politics”.¹³⁵ “How some things, which are not directly political by nature, ought to be mentioned”.¹³⁶ The history of the European state system was seen to be inseparable from that of European cultural history.

Heeren approached his subject based on a normative or ideal concept of the state system, suggesting the influence of natural law. He described a state system as a “society of states”, which for him meant a “society of moral individuals”, thus making it comparable “with civil society”.¹³⁷ Just as in the latter, the key issue was the maintenance “of the mutual independence of its members regardless of differences in power between them”.¹³⁸ The highest axiom of this society was “the sanctity of recognized legal vested rights”.¹³⁹ The main foundations of the system were “international law”, which might also be based “on tacit conventions”, and the “preservation of the political balance” to avert the “supremacy and pretensions of any one member”.¹⁴⁰ In other words, Heeren conceived the state system as a legal institution and took the view that the history of the European state system was inherently suited to develop into such a legal institution. For him putting the system on a legal footing was part of “the progress of culture” in the first place.¹⁴¹

¹³³ A.H.L. Heeren, *Handbuch der Geschichte des Europäischen Staatensystems und seiner Colonien von der Entdeckung beyder Indien bis zur Errichtung des Französischen Kayserthrons* (Göttingen, 1809), p. VII.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 55, 203, 368 and 532.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 369.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. V and XI.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. IV.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 9–10.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 7 and 9.

At the same time, Heeren avoided dogmatic interventions that could have detracted from history's own room for manoeuvre. Indeed, he doubted "that a legal condition, such as could be drawn up in theory, has ever been formally established among the different states in this system".¹⁴² He even affirmed that this involved a process guided in the first instance by antagonistic power interests and that these power struggles decided the degree of legal autonomy. There were constant setbacks and catastrophes. As Heeren "was working on the history of the European state system, he watched as many of the system's essential parts collapsed".¹⁴³ The Napoleonic Empire brought about a "*Principat*" (principality), which was, according to Heeren, opposed to the true concept of a state system.¹⁴⁴ It might therefore appear as though the European state system had become history, as though history had triumphed over natural law. Heeren also absolutely distanced himself from the "higher standpoint" "from which our speculative historians, looking down at the European state system as no more than a link in the chain of manifestations, claimed to be able to measure the progress of mankind"; that was the task of Enlightenment and Idealist philosophy of history, which established both the past and the future "on fixed is-ought principles", doing a disservice to both in the process in his opinion.¹⁴⁵ In response to every type of template, Heeren insisted on the "diversity" of the European family of states¹⁴⁶ and the "change in circumstances".¹⁴⁷ Every state had had a different "character" at various points in time, which interacted with the "changes" overall.¹⁴⁸ In view of this unpredictable historical dynamic it was tempting to put one's hope in the future, even if for Heeren it remained illusory to believe in the actual return of the "old".¹⁴⁹

The *Handbuch*, which was dedicated to more recent history, represented the reverse side of the *Ideen*'s study of the ancient world. Both works had as their subject an analogous political and mercantile system of peoples or states, which originated in analogous experiences of time. Both provided examples of political cultural history and proceeded from normative premises while concentrating on the singularity of specific

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. XI.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. IV.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. X.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. V.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. VI.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. XII.

historical phenomena. Both were the result of scholarly research. Literary ambitions could also be glimpsed in the *Handbuch*, even though it was very much designed for lecture room.

All of these endeavours, whether studies of antiquity or theological and legal history, converged in a major project for a new universal history. There had for long been no higher aim for Enlightenment historians throughout Europe than that of replacing Christian theological universal history, which still existed but had long been considered outmoded, with historiographical works that reflected the new taste for reason. The British *Universal History* was the first to set out the programme that subsequently became compulsory: a complete history of all aspects of culture and civilization, tracing the rise or advance of mankind from barbarism to culture and instructing the present to continue along this path regardless of any obstacles. In Germany, where the work was read with particular zeal, it was followed by an endless series of similar efforts to build on these beginnings. Göttingen once again took the lead. We have already come across some of its aspects. Heyne was one of the editors and contributors to the *General History*, which followed the *Universal History*. His universal cultural history of Greek and Roman antiquity was an example of the new kind of universal history. Heeren could with even greater justice call the *Ideen*, which had developed from this premise, a contribution to "world history".¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile the *Handbuch* introduced the European state system as one of the "greatest manifestations" "with which world history has provided us".¹⁵¹ Heeren in any case saw himself since his beginnings as tracing a "path through the field of world history".¹⁵² We recall that Spittler too regarded his ecclesiastical history as "a type of universal history".¹⁵³ The transition from such discrete projects to universal history in its full scope was reserved for two historians who subsequently long came to personify, not without reason, the Göttingen "historical school" at the time: Johann Christoph Gatterer and August Ludwig Schlözer, who were incidentally, for personal reasons, bitter enemies. It cannot be claimed that they completed their work on universal history with great accomplishment. Nevertheless, they not only recognized and went about the task set them but also showed in exemplary fashion which problems such a history had to resolve.

¹⁵⁰ Heeren, *Ideen* (see above, n. 41), p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Heeren, *Handbuch* (see above, n. 133), "Vorrede".

¹⁵² Heeren, "Schreiben" (see above, n. 37), p. LIV.

¹⁵³ As n. 64.

The new concept of the universal history had faced two recurring problems since the *Universal History*, one of material and one of form. First, the material needed for such a universal cultural history of mankind had to be identified and sifted through. Huge volumes of sources, exceeding all previous notions, had to be mastered, requiring a previously unheard-of amount of empirical research. Specialist knowledge of the most diverse kind, from geography to linguistics, was needed. Second, the quantity of collected material had to be shaped into a historiographical narrative. Criteria for selection, organization and synthesis had to be defined. The diverse mass of material had to be transformed into a formal unity, historical research into historical writing. The solution of the material problem was inevitably more successful than that of the problem of form for the time being. Masses of information gathered from sources were produced without moving beyond a merely superficial layout. Empirical scruples also played their part; everyone shrank back from overhasty simplification or harmonization. The *Universal History* confined itself to the most basic geographical and chronological coordinates. It was laid out like a world atlas and timetable. Gatterer and Schlözer were not much different in essence.¹⁵⁴

Gatterer's work on genealogy and diplomatics had recommended him as successor to the chair of general history in Göttingen, a post which he took up in 1759 and held until his death in 1799. He had been introduced to these auxiliary disciplines of historical source research by the jurist Johann Heumann during his studies in Altdorf. They were also the real focus of his work in Göttingen. He published in quick succession manuals on numismatics (1772), diplomatics (1773), heraldry (1773), geography (1775), and genealogy (1788). In 1766, he instigated the foundation of a Historical Institute attached to the university, whose primary task was to foster these disciplines. From these antecedents Gatterer turned his attention to universal history, including the German translation and continuation of the British collective work. Between 1761 and 1792, he published no less than seven different self-contained accounts in preparation for and to accompany his lectures, without having brought the series to an actual conclusion. He knew what he was embarking on: the aim was to select the

¹⁵⁴ Recent publications: Peter Hanns Reill, "Johann Christoph Gatterer", in: *Deutsche Historiker* (see above, n. 37), vol. 6 (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 7–22; Martin Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa: Der Historiker, Statistiker und Publizist August Ludwig (von) Schlözer (1735–1809)*, 2nd ed. (Münster, 2005); idem, "August Ludwig (von) Schlözer (1735–1809)", in: *Europa-Historiker* (see above, n. 37), vol. 1 (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 79–105.

“the most remarkable from the overwhelming mass” of historical events, to demonstrate “their reality based on the sources” and to recount “them in an interesting way and in context”.¹⁵⁵ However, he never in fact progressed beyond “the immense quantity” of material to be selected from the sources. That was hardly a minor achievement in itself. Gatterer had a very clear idea of what subjects belonged in a universal history, those worthy of the Enlightenment spirit: “the history of great events, of revolutions: they might deal with men and peoples themselves, or their relationship with the state, religion, science and learning, art and commerce; they might have taken place in ancient, medieval or modern times”;¹⁵⁶ to which it could be added: they might have occurred in Europe, Asia, Africa or America. He was also able to measure the size of the task that awaited the research of historical sources and one for which he was well equipped. Yet he was unable over the course of three decades to select “the most remarkable” events and to narrate “them in an interesting way and in context”. Apart from a rather vague idea of enlightenment and progress, he had no all-embracing concept of the whole going beyond an external compilation of the information he had collected. The structure followed technical-pragmatic schemata that could be varied at will so that they could always be questioned: four periods based on four “of the most remarkable” events, from the creation of the world until the discovery of America, and at the same time four types “of sources of historical truth”, thus reverting back to source research and the level of collection of materials; a division based on “systems of peoples”, which was to combine a diachronic and synchronic approach; a list of the “major world events” drawn from all areas of the history of civilization; a division based on periods and sub-periods of equal length “to ease the work of memory”; a distinction with systematic cross-references between the “history of peoples” and the “history of man”, that is, between political history organized “according to the sequence of peoples and events” and the history of civilization.¹⁵⁷ By the end Gatterer was essentially no wiser than at the beginning. “Devising a plan,” he concluded with resignation in 1792, “is the most difficult part of the whole art of writing history”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Johann Christoph Gatterer, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Weltgeschichte bis zur Entdeckung Amerikens* (Göttingen, 1792), p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ For the references, see Muhlack, *Geschichtswissenschaft* (see above, n. 10), pp. 130–133 and 259–60.

¹⁵⁸ Gatterer, *Versuch* (see above, n. 155), p. VI.

Schlözer came to world history from a different background. The habits of an antiquarian scholar as personified in Gatterer were alien, even repugnant, to him. His ambition was instead to leave behind his provincial origins in Hohenlohe for the wider world. He travelled extensively and saw himself as a mediator of the world. Instead of specializing in one field, he aimed to give impetus in many, outlining projects for others to carry out. His activities in Göttingen, where he became professor of philosophy in 1769 and took on the post of professor of politics and statistics in 1787, were also in this vein. In addition to political journalism, history, for the same practical motives, was one of the main objects of his endeavours. His very first work, which came out in 1758 in Swedish and 1761 in German, was historical and immediately revealed his general approach. The subject was, as indicated in the title, a *Versuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Handlung und Seefahrt in den ältesten Zeiten*. Schlözer first set out an ambitious programme of a universal "history of trade" stretching from antiquity to the present day, together with general economic and political history. This was followed by what was meant to be merely a sample, which, far from going back to the "most ancient times" of all, confined itself to an outline of Phoenician trade in which the author made use of the philological skills he had learned from Michaelis and Gesner. Actual implementation was left to authors such as Heeren, who naturally pursued his own path in the *Ideen*.¹⁵⁹ In his work on Nordic and Russian history, where he came closest to original research, Schlözer wanted above all to stimulate interest and leave the work to others. His *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte*, which he published in 1771 as one of the continuation volumes in the German edition of the British world history, in fact contained articles by other authors, which he furnished with prefaces and additional material.¹⁶⁰

Whenever Schlözer turned his attention to universal history in general beyond these finite projects, the result remained confined to lectures and textbooks rather in the scholastic mould. He announced in his *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (1772) that he was once again taking up

¹⁵⁹ Schlözer's first work is analysed at length in Peters, *Altes Reich* (see above, n. 154), pp. 46–52. The "Vorrede" are printed in: *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, ed. Horst Walter Blanke/Dirk Fleischer, 2 vols. (Fundamenta Historica) 1.1.2 Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 705–711; extracts in: Manfred Asendorf, *Aus der Aufklärung in die permanente Restauration: Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1974), pp. 65–70.

¹⁶⁰ See Peters, *Altes Reich*, pp. 162–169.

the idea. This “guide for my audience”¹⁶¹ pursued a didactic purpose and applied precise concepts to the Enlightenment concept of universal history. Schlözer outlined not only the entire scope of the material to be included, but also primarily raised the question of form which Gatterer had repeatedly failed to resolve. He distinguished between the “aggregate of world history”, in which all possible material was collected, and the “system of world history”, which related this material “to a single entity, the human race”. He concluded from this that universal history could first be realized in the transition from “aggregate to system”.¹⁶² His measure was the course of the history of human civilization, which he understood in a fairly utilitarian sense as the “origin, refinement and deterioration” of human history based on an interpretation of such phenomena as the “history of inventions”.¹⁶³ Based on these criteria he selected “those peoples who have, so to speak, set the tone in society as a whole”,¹⁶⁴ that is, those who had decisively influenced the process of greater human civilization.

His proposed structure strongly resembled Gatterer’s system of divisions. A first “ethnographic” section would deal with the histories of the selected peoples “across several or all periods”¹⁶⁵ classified into “Ancient History” and “Modern History” and described according to uniform criteria.¹⁶⁶ In an appendix to illustrate his methods Schlözer provided an overview of the “history of the main peoples of the world”.¹⁶⁷ A second “chronographic” section would illustrate the “synchronism” of the individual contributions by peoples to human history, divided into “periods” and “special epochs”, to be followed by “the detailed synchronism” in the form of “chronological tables”.¹⁶⁸ All these organizing principles could be derived from Schlözer’s “concept of systematic world history”¹⁶⁹ and were to that extent “not entirely arbitrary”, since they were determined by “history” and “nature”.¹⁷⁰ Yet these principles plainly ought to fulfil a purely practical function from the start, namely to provide an overview “in manageable forms”, “which contained as far as possible all the remark-

¹⁶¹ Schlözer, *Vorstellung* (see above, n. 11), “Vorrede”.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 14 and 18–19.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2 and 31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 108–112.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–222.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23, 48–52, 85 and 95.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

able events of world history based on our concept".¹⁷¹ A mnemonic theme gained prominence in this process. Schlözer placed great importance on the fact that "the memory should not be defeated by the quantity of subjects, confused by periods, places, and names."¹⁷² He occasionally wondered whether there were "not too many compartments", only to add that they would not trouble "an average memory".¹⁷³ He also aimed to assist memory by choosing "small and easy numbers" when measuring periods and tried to make them the same length.¹⁷⁴ What was achieved was no more than a rudimentary solution of the question of the form of universal history, just as with Gatterer.

A critique by Herder in the same year in which the *Vorstellung* appeared mercilessly exposed this deficiency.¹⁷⁵ The reviewer was astounded that in Schlözer's work everything remained on the "exterior" or "surface", that the author had not come to grips with either "the unit in history" or "such different periods and peoples"; in short that the "aggregation of many separate histories was too often nothing more than a mix to which the constituent parts did not wish to belong". Schlözer's mnemonic efforts appeared to him to have failed in even this limited purpose and rather seemed to be the "'cause of confusion' than of various distinctions". Schlözer was so incensed by this critique that he responded with an entire book, the second part of the *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (1773), in which he inevitably only provided his opponent with more ammunition. The controversy highlighted not just the difficulties faced by universal historians of the Enlightenment; it also signalled the emergence in the meantime of a new literary genre with its own claim to universal history: the philosophy of history, which would soon count Herder among its principle contributors.

The philosophy of history improved on the Enlightenment's universal history, thereby becoming the epitome of German Enlightenment historiography altogether. This is also noteworthy because the philosophy of history belonged to the non-university public more than any other, or at least had its beginnings there. The term itself came from Voltaire and originally meant an interpretation of universal history in the Enlightenment mould, as opposed to a theological Christian approach. Voltaire used it as a title

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 72 and 88–94.

¹⁷⁵ Printed in *ibid.*

in a work (*Philosophie de l'histoire*, 1765) attacking Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681). It was also in this general sense that Gatterer und Schlözer described their universal historical approach as philosophical.¹⁷⁶ When the philosophy of history became established as a specific historiographical genre in Germany during the second half of the 18th century, it nevertheless differentiated itself from Gatterer's and Schlözer's writings on universal history by containing a high degree of reflection or explicit speculation, especially once it came under the domain of philosophers themselves. The entire purpose of this literature was aimed at solving the formal problem with which universal historians were struggling: arriving at a uniform interpretation that allowed a systematic, coherent and consistent classification of everything individual. Attempts were made using *a priori* deduction to set out the criteria for such an interpretation and apply it to the empirical material, usually taken from the writings of historians. The preferred interpretive model was again the idea of a progressive history of humanity. This was indeed thought through for the first time in all clarity and had a completely different organizing function for these authors than it did in the writings of universal historians.

The founder of the genre even before the expression had first appeared was the Swiss writer Isaak Iselin in his work *Philosophische Muthmassungen. Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit*, first published in 1764 and in its seventh edition by 1791, which long defined the terms of the debate.¹⁷⁷ Iselin's "governing idea" was the "progress of mankind from the most extreme simplicity to an ever higher degree of radiance and well-being"; insofar as he demonstrated its continual effect in the course of world history, he wanted to urge on contemporaries and "our descendants" to further perfection.¹⁷⁸ This "governing idea" had been deduced from a philosophical brand of anthropology, which held that a "drive towards perfection" resided within man, arriving at its objective, by means of a "threefold law", from the senses through the imagination to reason.¹⁷⁹ Iselin transferred

¹⁷⁶ See Muhlack, *Geschichtswissenschaft* (see above, n. 10), p. 138.

¹⁷⁷ On Iselin: Ulrich Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin und die Spätaufklärung* (Bern, 1967); Andreas Urs Sommer, *Geschichte als Trost: Isaak Iselins Geschichtsphilosophie* (Basel, 2002); Béla Kapossy, *Iselin contra Rousseau: Sociable patriotism and the history of Mankind* (Basel, 2006); *Isaak Iselin und die Geschichtsphilosophie der europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. Lucas Marco Gisi/Wolfgang Rother (Studien zur Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Basel. Neue Folge) 6 (Basel, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ Isaak Iselin, *Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2 vols, 5th ed. (1796; repr. Hildesheim, 1976), here vol. 1, p. XXXIV.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

this definition obtained “in abstraction”¹⁸⁰ to the course of world history, applying an ontogenetic theory to phylogenetic empiricism.¹⁸¹ This “drive towards perfection” attributed to individuals corresponded in history to the “progress of mankind”, while the “threefold law” of the senses, imagination and reason corresponded to this evolution’s division into three main ages: the “state of nature”, the “state of savagery” and the “civilized state”.¹⁸² The history of the “civilized state” was in turn divided into three periods, culminating in the present, to which the entire account looked towards. All the empirical data cited by Iselin were incorporated into the philosophical scheme to create a maximum of internal cohesion. It is worth noting that Condorcet in his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794) followed exactly the same procedure, taking it even further. He proceeded from the lawful development of the capabilities with which an individual is born, which he had found out of experience, to the lawful progress of the human race in the succession of the ages and held that even future progress could be predicted absolutely.

At the same time as Iselin clearly took inspiration from authors such as Voltaire, he distanced himself from Rousseau. In the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), Rousseau had thoroughly criticized contemporary culture as influenced by Enlightenment ideas. He argued that man had defected from the freedom that defines him, which he illustrated through a didactic and metaphorical fable telling of man’s journey from his natural to his social state. Iselin’s own enlightened consciousness had been deeply wounded, and he also dedicated himself to the philosophy of history to refute Rousseau’s criticism, whereby his true history of progress would disprove Rousseau’s fictional history of decline. His method was to seek to reduce the fable to absurdity by means of historical criticism. He treated it, contrary to Rousseau’s obvious intention, as a history to be measured according to the historiographical claim to truth. Rousseau’s natural state appeared to him as “the condition of men as animals”, “an absurdity unknown to nature”.¹⁸³ For him the “drive towards perfection”, for Rousseau “the unfortunate tool” “through which man is persuaded no longer to be a man”, was the reason

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁸¹ On this, see Wolfgang Rother, “Geschichte als Trost—Geschichte als System: Zur Typologie der Geschichtsphilosophie der Aufklärung”, in: *Isaak Iselin* (see above, n. 177), pp. 29–52, here pp. 38–39.

¹⁸² Iselin, *Geschichte* (see above, n. 178), vol. 1, pp. 118, 186 and 307.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 139.

for the constant higher evolution which he found in the “scenes of history”.¹⁸⁴ Although not without “remnants of barbarism”,¹⁸⁵ present-day Europe appeared to him to have climbed to a previously unreached peak. Rousseau himself figured in Iselin’s depiction of the present by virtue of “his deceitfulness and harmfulness” as the enemy of “nature” and “reason” and consequently an obstacle to further progress.¹⁸⁶

Again, Rousseau was not a philosopher of history, but he did contribute to the emergence of a philosophy of history in his vein in Germany in stark contrast to that propounded by Iselin. One of its chief proponents was Herder in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774).¹⁸⁷ His philosophical approach was based on a Rousseauian concept of freedom that materialized in an endless diversity of historical individualities. This concept had matured in him, just as with Rousseau, from his own experience, from an unrelenting struggle for his own identity and self-determination. Herder rejected both the premises and results of Iselin, whom he mentions in the same breath as Voltaire.¹⁸⁸ Instead of deriving history “from purely general concepts of the school”, which he called the “fashionable judgements of our century”,¹⁸⁹ he wished to capture it in its particularity or singularity. For this reason he disputed the concept of a linear progress of history advancing ineluctably towards the present, or towards any sort of external goal for that matter, instead ascribing to each age its own ideal and form of perfection: “there is a certain sense in which every human perfection is national, secular and, when looked at closely, individual”, so “that in the end no two moments in the world are the same”.¹⁹⁰ Herder too believed in a progression in history but in the sense of an open forwards movement resulting from the specific sequence and interaction of individualities: “all is means and end at the same time”.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, he could not hide, nor did he wish to, his affinity with the Enlightenment’s views on the philosophy of history

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 134 and 138.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 350–377.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 335–36.

¹⁸⁷ On Herder: Meinecke, *Die Entstehung* (see above, n. 3), pp. 355–444; Johann Gottfried Herder 1744–1803, ed. Gerhard Sauder (Hamburg, 1987); Ulrich Muhlack, “Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803)”, in: *Europa-Historiker* (see above, n. 37), vol. 2 (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 49–76.

¹⁸⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, ed. Hans Dietrich Irmscher (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 49.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 30 and 32.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 53.

despite his sharp criticism of Iselin. He considered it equivalent to a historical law that "the concepts of human freedom, sociability, equality, and universal happiness are being elucidated and disseminated more widely",¹⁹² and he glimpsed in the present "the rich harvest from the grains".¹⁹³ He continued this tendency in his main work on the philosophy of history, the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791). It even allowed him to arrive at a less harsh judgement of Iselin.

When the first volumes of Herder's *Ideen* appeared, Immanuel Kant entered the fray, also in his way a student of Rousseau. In his opinion the work lacked "a logical punctuality in defining the concepts", "a careful distinction and preservation of principles", as well as historical and critical precision.¹⁹⁴ His criticism was equally informed by philosophical and theoretical concerns, on the one hand, and by historical and empirical ones on the other. In his own draft response, the "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht" (1784), he set out his understanding of the philosophy of history as "an *a priori* guide" that should precede the "shaping of the actual, merely empirically drafted history".¹⁹⁵ He considered such a "guide" indispensable because mere empiricism was incapable on its own of providing a cohesive understanding "of human affairs", offering no more than an "aggregate of human acts".¹⁹⁶ At the same time, the "guide" ought not to anticipate the empirical history itself but rather make it possible in the first place. For Kant, his own "idea of a world history" was even simply "an idea of what a philosophical mind (which would, incidentally, have to be extremely knowledgeable in history) might attempt from a different perspective."¹⁹⁷ The philosophy of history and empirical history could be compared to the hypothesis and its verification. Kant interjected brief observations on the "history of men" as a preliminary verification of his own hypothesis,¹⁹⁸ at the same time revealing the extent of his "knowledge of history". The "guide" itself suggested the model of deductive argument. Kant formulated from the "nature" of mankind, which he saw as the disposition towards freedom, the epochs of a history of the progress of mankind whose external aim was

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Geschichtsphilosophie*, ed. Manfred Riedel (Stuttgart, 1974), pp. 54 and 61.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 22 and 36.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 30–31 and 36–37.

the “establishment of a perfect civil constitution” and “an external relationship between the states based on the rule of law”.¹⁹⁹ It followed from the first of these premises that this history could not be consummated over the heads of the people but had to be transmitted from age to age by their own acts of self-determination: “Nature has desired that man creates everything out of himself and shall not partake of any happiness and perfection that he himself has not created.”²⁰⁰ The “intention of nature” and the “freedom of the will”²⁰¹ were irrevocably bound; indeed, they were essentially one and the same. On the whole the relationship between philosophy and history had gained in precision since Iselin and Herder, not to mention Gatterer and Schlözer, much as this would of course have been inconceivable if they had not laid the groundwork.

The rise of the philosophy of history at the same time consolidated the greater importance ascribed to history during the Enlightenment. Philosophy had until then far surpassed history in its claim on knowledge and now faced up to the necessity of making history an object of its consideration. This signified a tremendous valorization of history and certified its ever greater autonomy. History’s new status also found expression in the mistrust felt by historians towards this philosophical interpretation. They responded by insisting on their exclusive competence over the subject. Schlözer referred in an accusatory tone in his *Vorstellung* to “a new type of history, which has mostly been practised by philosophers to date, since it is the property of the historian.”²⁰² One also thinks of Heeren, when he took issue with “the fixed is-ought principles” of “speculative historians”.²⁰³ A historian such as Friedrich Schiller, who, as professor of philosophy at Jena from 1789 to 1792, lectured on world history in the strict Kantian sense, remained an exception precisely because he was not one of the club.²⁰⁴ Only Herder came close to being accepted by “professional” historians as the most likely to refrain from unrelenting philosophical reasoning, if not by Schlözer, who perceived a “belletrist” in him,²⁰⁵ then by

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

²⁰² Schlözer, *Vorstellung* (see above, n. 11), p. 30.

²⁰³ Heeren, *Handbuch* (see above, n. 133), p. X.

²⁰⁴ For Schiller as a historian see recently: *Schiller als Historiker*, ed. Otto Dann/Norbert Oellers/Ernst Osterkamp (Stuttgart, 1995); Thomas Prüfer, *Die Bildung der Geschichte: Friedrich Schiller und Anfänge der modernen Geschichtswissenschaft*, (Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur) 24 (Köln, 2002); *Schiller und die Geschichte*, ed. Michael Hofmann/Jörn Rüsen/Mirjam Springer (Munich, 2006).

²⁰⁵ Schlözer, *Vorstellung* (see above, n. 11), p. 225.

Heeren, who held him in high esteem.²⁰⁶ Historians preferred another kind of philosophical literature on history to give expression to their professional self-confidence. They tended to write not treatises on universal history, but expositions on its theoretical foundations in which they began to elaborate a scientific doctrine for the discipline. Such works on history had been appearing since the middle of the 18th century, largely as part of university lectures.²⁰⁷ They sought to secure history's new scientific status just as this was evolving in the discipline's actual practice. Two authors in particular, Johann Martin Chladenius and Jakob Wegelin, represented the spectrum of this theoretical self-reflection.

Chladenius was professor of early ecclesiastical history in Leipzig from 1742 and professor of theology, eloquence and poetry in Erlangen from 1745. One general theme can be seen to run across the entire duration of his long teaching and scholarly career, his attempt to make his own Lutheran orthodoxy compatible with modern forms of knowledge. He was increasingly drawn towards the new mode of historical thinking, leaving behind his early interest in the philosophy of Christian Wolff. He first became familiar with history as a universal auxiliary discipline, but quickly came to view it as so indispensable that he began to investigate its special significance. Grasping its essence from which to formulate a theory of history became his life's work. He gave lectures on the *Ars historica* from 1749, which went on to inform his main work, the *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* (1752). This contained a "science of historical knowledge" in the form of his own "specimen on the doctrine of reason".²⁰⁸ Wolff maintained the traditional subordination of history as a form of uncertain and no more than probable knowledge to philosophy as the embodiment of certain and true knowledge. In contrast, Chladenius set out to show, without denying the difference in principle between philosophy with its focus on the universal and history with its focus on the individual, that historical knowledge had its own kind of certainty and truth. The very historicization of historical knowledge itself was at the heart of this in the form of the doctrine of "observer" and "point of view".²⁰⁹ This held that a given past event, beginning with eye-witnesses of an event

²⁰⁶ See Becker-Schaum, *Heeren: Ein Beitrag* (see above, n. 37), p. 112.

²⁰⁷ For an overview: "Historik als akademische Praxis. Dokumentation der Historik-Vorlesungen an deutschsprachigen Universitäten von 1750 bis 1815", in: *Theoretiker* (see above, n. 159), vol. 1, pp. 124–132.

²⁰⁸ Johann Martin Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* (1752; repr. Wien, 1985), p. 25.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

through its first written recording to later reproductions, was not in itself accessible to the historian but solely to the perspective adopted by him in each instance: "Everyone considers something from his own standpoint", "similarly from his situation" as well as "from his own internal state".²¹⁰ No one was capable of detaching himself from his personal and social situation. This perspective had until then normally been regarded as either subjective or a subjective distortion of historical knowledge, to be eliminated as far as possible. However, Chladenius declared it to be the very precondition of such knowledge since historical knowledge was necessarily "partial".²¹¹ At the same time, he rejected deliberate "distortion" of the historical facts by means of all sorts of "insidious tricks"; in this sense he did insist upon "an impartial narrative".²¹² Perspective and the desire for truth were one and the same for him. The whole was founded on historical source research. It was ultimately on this that the reliability of historical knowledge was based.

The Swiss scholar Jakob Wegelin had been professor of history at the Königliche Ritterakademie, a precursor of the later university, in Berlin since 1765. He made a name for himself as a historian of European state history, before publishing in 1783 his *Briefe über den Werth der Geschichte*. This was a work of historiology which advanced even further than Chladenius the autonomous status of history, partly because, unlike Chladenius, Wegelin had completely freed himself from his Protestant background and held quite free-thinking religious views. For him there was no question that history had its own exceptional "value". He was determined to bring this to light from the widest variety of angles, using the results to formulate rules for a future theory of historical writing. History ought to accommodate itself to "the true situation" of events, how "it really is": "enlightened history is thus none other than an account of the true sequence of events".²¹³ He discouraged any reflections not linked to events: one ought to refrain from "delving into theories which will be understood by no more than a handful of people and which are often as harmful as they are objectionable to historical truth."²¹⁴ Yet he had no objection to the philosophy of history as long as it "does not consist of a dry formulation of philosophical opinions but a clear understanding of its relation to the true nature

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 98–99.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 151.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 149–50.

²¹³ J. Wegelin, *Briefe über den Werth der Geschichte* (1783; repr. Königstein, 1981), p. 114.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

of things.”²¹⁵ He declared the benchmark for this to be the correct relationship between the universal and the particular, which he dealt with in various attempts. In his view there were certain inalienable universals, but these never came to light unmediated, only in manifold refractions or gradations. Universal “concepts” or “principles” were nothing without their “application to the social condition”, itself determined by the relevant “circumstances”.²¹⁶ “Human reason”, he wrote, “has been forced by social situations to express itself in thousands of different ways, and it insists on its rights as much as with savages and niggers as with the most refined of peoples”.²¹⁷ Reason and history began to merge at this point. Wegelin considered it “accepted that there is not only a general course of things [...] but there is also a particular social passage in the affairs of a nation which forms [...] national reason.”²¹⁸ Humanity, morality, culture: everything could be found “in the particular relation of the circumstances, time, place, and individuals”.²¹⁹ The special use granted to history resided in its capacity to penetrate not only one’s own situation as determined by the relevant historical preconditions and thereby gain concrete ideas for one’s own conduct, but in the development of a pragmatic capacity for judgement in the first place, never based “on principles and true theories but on usage and certain specific facts”.²²⁰ Virtually no other work of the late 18th century demonstrated the degree to which the historicization of thought, and hence the autonomy of history, had become possible during the Enlightenment.

These developments received their final impulse with the advent of historicism. Even during the late phase of the Enlightenment it was taken for granted that history, for all the high regard it was held in, was not all-encompassing but was integrated into fields of knowledge that preceded or superseded it. Enlightened reason was eager to engage itself with the true diversity of the historical world but did after all possess an inaccessible universalist core which enclosed an entire system of normative ideas. Seen as a scientific system, this meant that history in all its branches essentially remained consigned to an auxiliary role. Its ever greater autonomy was still not reflected beyond its application in practice.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Even where the link to a higher field of reference was barely still relevant, the essentially subordinate relationship was not questioned. These dualistic forms began to be regarded as contradictory with the rise of historicism. History's subordinate status was unsustainable; it needed to be raised to a level where it possessed absolute validity. Everything universal and normative that until then had informed history or was superimposed on it, itself became historical. Henceforth there was nothing relating to man and his world that lay outside history. Historical thought became the paradigm of thought about human beings. Seen in scientific terms that meant that history lost its auxiliary status wherever it was practiced and became an independent discipline. This was the case even where the inherited relationship of inferiority continued in outward form. The former reference sciences themselves had no choice in the long run but to submit themselves to historicization. A type of universal science of history gradually emerged encompassing all subsequent human, cultural and social sciences.

The most palpable sign of this change was a new concept of historical research based on source criticism. Enlightenment historiography, following on from the Renaissance humanists, had raised this to a level that could hardly be surpassed in its attention to detail, but the new approach surpassed this qualitatively to become identical with historical science. Even during the Enlightenment, history's contribution essentially consisted in passing on already existing knowledge. Its narratives, regardless of their subject, ultimately served the illustrative or exemplary purpose of confirming preconceived universals. Newly discovered facts were no different than old ones in this respect. This was compounded by the fact that historical knowledge was still in principle regarded as equivalent to the historiographical tradition. It was taken for granted that each age needed to write its own history and that all contemporary histories would form a consecutive sequence of *historia perpetua* passed down over the centuries and continued from time to time. Historical works dealing with earlier periods were then measured according to the extent to which they were based on contemporary sources. Even the most stringent source criticism did not aim at rejecting these works but at purifying tradition to establish its true core.

History as tradition was based on a static concept of historical knowledge: the idea that from all that had occurred in the past there was essentially only one finding that would be valid for all time once it had been formulated or made explicit. This premise became invalid under historicism. Historical knowledge ceased to be a finished product, to be handed

down from generation to generation, and became an ongoing enterprise which was constantly shifting depending on the ever changing interests of historians. This dynamic concept destroyed the foundation of the previous understanding of historical science. From now on history no longer had anything in common with accepted reservoirs of knowledge but with the never-ending generation of new knowledge. Even the appropriation of traditional knowledge was a creative act in this context and produced new findings. The understanding of historical science was founded not on tradition but research. The historiographical tradition was only one, and by no means the most important, of these sources or types of sources providing historians with the building blocks for their reconstruction of the past. Source research on the whole, despite being able to draw on its links with the great contributions from Renaissance humanism to Enlightenment historiography, acquired a totally different dimension and a previously unknown force as a result of the fact that historical science had become identical with historical research. It could be said that only through this understanding of historical science did source research realize its potential.

The rise of historical thought and historical science, or even its supremacy, which was accomplished under historicism, did not occur in a vacuum but in a particular historical situation. The crucial factor in this was the emergence of a different experience of reality. History had previously been bound up with an awareness of life's constant structures; one believed in timeless universals, in one decisive and undisputed knowledge, in the static knowledge inherited from tradition, because one's own personal world was basically felt to be stable. The new history, conversely, made people aware that life had been thrown off course, exposed to the process of permanent change, which at the very least threw doubt on the previous certainties. One heralded the omnipotence of history, its autonomy, the dynamic of historical research, because one's own personal world was felt to be on the point of dissolving. The key event that empowered the new experience of reality and considerably facilitated the arrival of historicism was the French Revolution, including its consequent struggles, which was to shape the entire 19th century. The sudden collapse of a political and social system that had existed apparently since time immemorial, an increasingly radical and finally ever more extreme series of constitutional experiments, the convulsions in Europe and around the world from revolutionary wars: these were occurrences of acutely accelerated change that astonished those who lived through them. The new historical thought was essentially born out of this experience.

In fact, most of the Enlightenment historians discussed so far were at least partial witnesses to the French Revolution. Some of them took up the subject in their writings. For example, Spittler, who dealt with the “main subject” of the constitution and stressed its relevant changes in his *Entwurf der Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten* (1793/94); or Heeren, who in both of his main works (1793 and 1809, respectively), contrasted the diversity of political and mercantile relationships with the universalist claims of the Revolution and the empire it gave rise to. Both thinkers, however, were equally rooted in pre-revolutionary outlooks, which they did not fundamentally question even after 1789. Spittler judged European constitutional history according to his old ideal of a balanced constitution, a belief which even his commitment to historical understanding could not shake, while Heeren did not break away from either his classicist or his natural law basic assumptions. Herder expressed the view of many when he observed in 1792: “Humanity is older and bigger than France”.²²¹ He did not think he needed to change anything in his understanding of history. It evidently needed another generation, for whom the Revolution was a type of experience of initiation, to complete a revolution in historical thinking. One of the first to bring the experience of revolution to the process of historicization was the young Wilhelm von Humboldt. In 1791, he wrote “Ideen über Staatsverfassung, durch die neue französische Constitution veranlasst”. Here, taking an attack on the first revolutionary constitution as his point of departure, he reflected upon the themes of universality and individuality, reason and reality, developing along the way fundamental categories for the new historical thinking.²²²

Why did historicism arise in Germany as opposed to somewhere else? Two reasons should be mentioned here. The first relates to the formation of the German nation. It is well known that the modern German nation was not constituted as a political nation but, finally during the Enlightenment, as a cultural nation. It was made up of intellectuals who kept a distance from the state and politics and had a tendency to treat political problems as cultural problems. This was indeed how they reacted to the French Revolution. It stimulated them to formulate new aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific concepts. In Germany, there was no political revolution only a cultural revolution, with the rise of historicism its pivotal element.

²²¹ Muhlack, *Herder* (see above, n. 187), p. 72.

²²² In: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Werke* ed. Andreas Flitner/Klaus Giel, vol. 1 (Darmstadt, 1960), pp. 33–42.

The "Ideen" of the young Humboldt can also be read in this connection as the founding document of historicism: he does not dwell on a political evaluation of the "new French constitution"; instead this "inspires" him to new reflections on history. The second reason, and the more important one in terms of its immediate impact, was the university founded in Berlin in 1810. This gave a permanent home to the new historical thinking, which became exemplary for Germany, Europe and the world.

Berlin's foundation was attributable to the same coincidence of state and scholarly enterprises that had always distinguished German universities, culminating most recently in Göttingen. Following the disasters of Jena and Tilsit (1806/07), the Prussian leadership instituted a reform programme aimed both at reorganizing the state apparatus and making the populace more politically active. One of its priorities was an overhaul of education. Wilhelm von Humboldt had long been at the forefront of such changes. There was a need for schools suitable for training the new system's standard-bearers, namely, on the one hand, administrators of competence and responsibility, and, on the other, free citizens. The new university was to crown this educational reform. Humboldt proclaimed the slogan of education through science and scholarship. This could only be achieved if science and learning did not stop at the external transmission of knowledge but became the self-determined activity of educators and students: "Everything depends on maintaining the principle of regarding science and learning as not yet entirely discovered and never entirely to be discovered, and never to give up searching for them as such"; otherwise "everything is irretrievable and lost forever".²²³ Education should thus be practised as science by means of research, which once again propelled the science of history, renewed or about to be renewed by historicism, to a preeminent position among vehicles of education. Humboldt himself came from the new historical thought; the research-based scholarly programme that he set up for Berlin was taught by scholars with the same background. Humboldt's collaborators in the Berlin foundation, the philologist Friedrich August Wolf, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, could be said to come from the same intellectual milieu. The new university was very much established under the influence of the emerging historicism and, conversely, nurtured it according to those expectations. Thus the process came full circle and this also insofar as national cultural and Prussian interests

²²³ Ibid., vol. 4 (Darmstadt, 1964), pp. 257–58.

came under protection with the foundation of this university by none other than Humboldt. This was a prelude to the long and winding road that led to the foundation of the German state.

Humboldt made careful appointments to ensure that the new direction in Berlin was as widely represented as possible. Wolf, Fichte, and Schleiermacher were in place from the beginning. Wolf was a student of Heyne and professor of eloquence in Halle from 1784 to 1807. He had attracted attention with his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, published in 1795, a history of the tradition of the Homeric poems considered as a historical phenomenon. Based on the concrete insights gained, he published a *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft* in 1807, which unchained philology from its previous classicist ties and was committed solely to the “aim” of “finding out about ancient mankind itself”.²²⁴ The formerly auxiliary discipline of rhetoric was promoted to an independent historical science of Greek and Roman antiquity. Under these auspices Wolf took over the position of professor of ancient literature in Berlin. He was accompanied by his student August Boeckh, who was committed to the same idea. Fichte, who had formerly been professor of philosophy at Jena and Erlangen, had inaugurated a new form of philosophy of history with his lectures on *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1806). This aimed at the unity of philosophy and history, which amounted to the immanence of reason in reality. His appointment to the Berlin chair of philosophy would also give a forum to these views, later developed by Hegel in his own way. Schleiermacher, most recently professor of theology in Halle, had formulated in his *Reden über die Religion* (1799) a concept of religion that would do justice to the “particularity of every historical religion” including naturally the “essence” of Christianity.²²⁵ This programme of historical theology secured his appointment in Berlin. They were joined by other scholars from other disciplines. One of the most famous at the time was the jurist Friedrich Carl von Savigny. He had been called to the university in Landshut in 1808, another institution open to new ideas, but preferred Berlin. In 1802, while still a lecturer in Marburg, he formulated as the first principle in a lecture on juristic methodology: “Jurisprudence is a historical science”.²²⁶ His monograph on the *Recht des Besitzes* (1803) put this principle into

²²⁴ Friedrich August Wolf, *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft* (1807; repr. Berlin, 1985), pp. 124–25.

²²⁵ Franz Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 4, 3rd ed. (Freiburg, 1955), p. 304.

²²⁶ Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *Vorlesungen über juristische Methodologie 1802–1842*, ed. Aldo Mazzacane (Ius Commune. Sonderhefte) 63 (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), p. 87.

practice. He founded the historical school of law in Berlin, whose central organ from 1815 was the *Zeitschrift für geschichtliche Rechtswissenschaft*, edited by Savigny along with his Berlin colleagues Karl Friedrich Eichhorn and Johann Friedrich Ludwig Göschen. In the opening contribution Savigny, to vindicate his historical understanding of the law, gave a “general account of the contrast between historical and unhistorical viewpoints” that could be adopted as the motto of historicism in general: “history is not a collection of moral and political examples”, “but the only way to gain true knowledge of our condition.”²²⁷

The least successful of these endeavours meanwhile were those relating to history in the strict sense. The original choice was Heeren, at the height of his fame and historical expertise at the time. When he turned down the post, one of his students, the Greifswald professor Friedrich Rühls, a specialist in Scandinavian history, was selected. He debuted in Berlin with a rather conventional *Entwurfeiner Propädeutik des historischen Studiums*.²²⁸ But a spectacular replacement came from elsewhere, namely in the form of Barthold Georg Niebuhr.²²⁹

He was the son of Carsten Niebuhr, who had come from a Friesian farming family and had gained fame for his travels in the Orient. He embarked on studies of ancient history early on, inspired by Heyne and Wolf, but when he completed his time at university in Kiel, he initially pursued a career in the Danish and then in the Prussian financial administration in the circle of reformers under Freiherr vom Stein. He nevertheless kept up with his historical interests in his leisure time and was soon considered promising despite not having published a single line. In March 1810, he became a member of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin. Only a few months later he left the Prussian civil service following a quarrel with the new chancellor Hardenberg, with the consequence that he now had

²²⁷ Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *Grundgedanken der Historischen Rechtsschule 1814/40* (Deutsches Rechtsdenken) 8 (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), pp. 15–16.

²²⁸ Friedrich Rühls, *Entwurf einer Propädeutik des historischen Studiums*. Berlin 1811, ed. Hans Schleier/Dirk Fleischer (Waltrop, 1997).

²²⁹ See mainly: Alfred Heuß, *Barthold Georg Niebuhrs wissenschaftliche Anfänge. Untersuchungen und Mitteilungen über die Kopenhagener Manuscripte und zur europäischen Tradition der lex agraria (loi agraire)* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge) 114 (Göttingen, 1981); idem, “Näheres zu Niebuhr: Zur 150. Wiederkehr seines Todestages am 2. Januar 1981”, in: *Antike und Abendland* 27 (1981), pp. 1–33; Gerrit Walter, *Niebuhrs Forschung* (Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen) 35 (Stuttgart, 1993); Wilfried Nippel, “Barthold Georg Niebuhr und die Begründung der modernen Althistorie”, in: *Die modernen Väter der Antike: Die Entwicklung der Altertumswissenschaften an der Akademie und Universität in Berlin des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Annette M. Baertschi/Colin G. King (Berlin, 2009), pp. 87–113.

the welcome opportunity, albeit involuntary, to devote himself entirely to history. Although his hopes of an appointment to the new university were frustrated, as a member of the Akademie he had the right to hold lectures there without being subject to any other obligations. He took up this right immediately in the first semester, beginning with lectures on Roman history, which he then published successively. Their success was unprecedented and groundbreaking for the science of history.

Niebuhr had before that mainly concentrated on Roman agrarian law, having written the *Kopenhagener Manuscripte* on the subject while still working for the Danish civil service. His original idea had been to extract political teachings for the present from this material but he quickly encountered a number of open questions that drew him deeper into the particularity of Roman conditions. The practical interest changed into an empirical interest with the potential of historical instruction for the present. Now in Berlin and inspired by the prevailing climate of scholarly optimism, Niebuhr resolved to attempt a general narrative of Roman history based on these premises. The outcome was a unique demonstration of the new idea of historical research. It had been taken for granted until then that Roman history, or ancient history as a whole, was contained in the works of ancient historians. One copied these authors, at most filling in the gaps. Recent, even highly sophisticated approaches to source criticism had left the essential validity of this literature intact. The old model of history as tradition loomed particularly large. Niebuhr destroyed this model. He showed that an entirely new account of Roman history was possible, that none of its details was secure, rather that everything needed to be researched from scratch. His application of source criticism to Greek and Roman historiography of early Roman history had admittedly been anticipated by earlier authors such as Perizonius (1685) and Beaufort (1738). What was new and decisive in his approach, however, was that his criticism was no longer aimed at safeguarding the tradition but at quite independent fact-finding that made no concessions to ancient authorities. Nothing could be salvaged from Livy, who until then stood for the oldest history of Rome regardless of any doubts raised by source criticism: "We have a different view of history, different requirements, and we must either decide not to write the earliest history of Rome or undertake an entirely different work than an inevitably unsuccessful reproduction of that which the Roman historian believed was history."²³⁰ The ancient

²³⁰ B.G. Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1811), p. IX.

author's "belief" had no place when faced with the modern historian's own empirical standards.

In 1825, Leopold Ranke was summoned from the gymnasium in Frankfurt an der Oder to the university in Berlin because a year before he had published the *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, a work in which Niebuhr's approach was transferred to more modern history.²³¹ The *Römische Geschichte* had left a huge mark on the Leipzig student: "the first German historical work that made an impression on me",²³² that is, which was not compiled from earlier accounts but based on the author's own research. The young Ranke saw an opportunity to build a scholarly reputation for himself. He considered it unwise to try to copy Niebuhr in his own field of ancient history and consequently turned his attention to more recent history, where pioneering work could still be done. The subject of the *Geschichten* arose out of an interest in the era of the Renaissance and the Reformation, which Ranke had pursued since the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817. Prior to Ranke, historians, most recently Heeren,²³³ had told the history of European states around 1500 based on Guicciardini and other contemporary authors in faithful harmony with the idea of *historia perpetua*. Ranke undermined the credibility of these authors to such an extent that the possibility of a re-narration was excluded altogether. Rather, new, original research was required. He regarded this only as a start. All his future work, which continued to be dedicated to early modern national history, was based on this foundation. His teaching in Berlin, which included lectures on all aspects of world history and regular practical seminars, had no other aim than to teach his methods, once proven and adopted, and at the same time to develop professional methods.

²³¹ On Ranke's first work: Ernst Schulz, "Rankes Erstlingswerk oder der Beginn der kritischen Geschichtsschreibung über die Neuzeit", in: idem, *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch: Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 44–64; Siegfried Baur, *Versuch über die Historik des jungen Ranke* (Historische Forschungen) 62 (Berlin, 1998); Johannes Süßmann, *Geschichtsschreibung oder Roman?: Zur Konstitutionslogik von Geschichtserzählungen zwischen Schiller und Ranke (1780–1824)* (Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen) 41 (Stuttgart, 2000); Ulrich Muhlack, "Die Genese eines Historikers: Zur Autobiographie und zur Korrespondenz des jungen Ranke", in: *Historie und Leben: Der Historiker als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenosse: Festschrift für Lothar Gall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter Hein/Klaus Hildebrand/Andreas Schulz (Munich 2006), pp. 21–40.

²³² Leopold von Ranke, *Zur eigenen Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Alfred Dove (Leipzig, 1890), p. 31.

²³³ Heeren, *Handbuch* (see above, n. 133), p. 20.

In his first work, Ranke also came up with a provisional solution to another problem: the relationship between historical research and historical writing. This had been unproblematic for as long as the traditional ethical and rhetorical understanding of historiography dominated and thus placed strict limitations on the empirical knowledge to be gained from the sources. Difficulties began to emerge when further historicization required the effort spent in research to increase. This would be bound to make the conventional historiographical format untenable in the long run. Enlightenment historiography faced this dilemma for the first time and had very little idea how to approach it. We should remind ourselves that Heyne had barely dared venture beyond source research, that Gatterer and Schlözer struggled to find the correct form for a new universal history, that the concepts put forward by philosophers of history differed not only among themselves but were rejected by most “actual” historians. The desire for the appropriate historiographical form remained intense and there were no shortage of attempts to satisfy it. As well as writers such as Winckelmann, Möser and Spittler, special mention should be given here to Heeren. Nonetheless, all of them remained indebted to the old model to some degree, a model that was less and less compatible with the growing importance of research.

This changed with the advent of historicism. Once history became identical with historical research, a form of historical writing was needed that took this equivalence seriously, that is, that saw its task as nothing else than to present results of research. Niebuhr had recognized this task but had arrived at an inadequate solution. His *Römische Geschichte* was essentially no more than an externally ordered arrangement of investigations based on source criticism. It illustrated Niebuhr’s research but was far removed from historiography with high literary standards. Historical research and historical writing did not merge together. Niebuhr was fully aware of this deficiency. The book had “greater claim” to “being a scholarly work than a work of art”. He asked for “an indulgent view of his language and description”: “It would have been difficult even for a master to alleviate the difficulty of laborious investigations and to deal lightly with the rigid collection of parts.”²³⁴ Even after he had published a “fully revised” new edition in 1830,²³⁵ he had to admit that it largely contained “mere

²³⁴ Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte* (see above, n. 230), vol. 1, p. XIII.

²³⁵ B.G. Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Berlin, 1830); the quotation on the title page.

objects of scholarly investigation and details that can only be of interest to others in the trade"; he later toyed with the idea "when this academic work [...] is complete" "of writing an altogether different history of the Romans, without investigations, evidence and scholarship, as one would have written it 1800 years ago".²³⁶ Putting to one side the anachronistic sounding classicist impulse, this was the path that already been taken by the young Ranke. His first work was in fact divided into two parts. The *Geschichten* contained the actual historical narrative, while the appended text *Zur Kritik neuerer Geschichtschreiber* dealt with Ranke's study of sources. The two parts were linked by a dense series of notes that Ranke placed under the historiographical text. They verified one by one the sources that the author had drawn upon and therefore documented that the description was completely based on research, without interrupting the thread of the historical narrative in the process. This manner of combining historical research with historical writing was also used by Ranke in his later works. The need for this link was clear to him from the beginning and he always considered it one of his principle tasks to meet it. In his view, history was "art and science at the same time",²³⁷ and while he drew a clear separation between the historiographical art and the poetic, and insisted on the "[s]trict presentation of the facts regardless of how qualified and prosaic they might be", he was also absolutely convinced of the particular allure of a logically coherent historical narrative.²³⁸ At the very least history should not only "satisfy all the demands of criticism and scholarship", but also "grant the cultivated mind the same pleasure as produced by the adept literary creation."²³⁹ The great historical writing of German historicism emerged from these ideas.

(Translated from the German by Fiona Robb.)

²³⁶ Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Briefe: Neue Folge: 1816–1830*, ed. Eduard Vischer, vol. 4 (Bern, 1984), p. 117.

²³⁷ Leopold Ranke, *Französische Geschichte vornehmlich im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart, 1861), p. 6.

²³⁸ Leopold Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, vol. 1 [only vol.] (1824; repr. Hildesheim, 2010), pp. VII–VIII.

²³⁹ Ranke, *Französische Geschichte* (see above, n. 237), vol. 5, p. 6.

9. IDENTITY AND INNOVATION: HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

David Allan

Few times and places today enjoy a greater reputation for intellectual significance than Scotland in the age of the Enlightenment. This situation, however, is nothing new, for famous contemporaries virtually queued to heap praise on the country and its inhabitants. Voltaire observed, albeit with more than a hint of sarcasm, that “It is from *Scotland* that we receive rules of taste in all the *arts*—from the epic poem to gardening”.¹ Thomas Jefferson, clearly an authority on such matters, estimated that for scientific learning “No place in the World can pretend to a competition with Edinburgh”.² The novelist Tobias Smollett, meanwhile, hailed the Scottish capital as “a hotbed of genius”.³ Subsequently the claims made for Scotland’s people in the first century after the Treaty of Union with England in 1707 have scarcely moderated. Indeed two scholars have recently proposed that the Scottish Enlightenment was where modernity itself was born: in this view our own world is a product of the psychological revolution wrought by David Hume and the invention of social science by his close friends Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson.⁴

Hume himself, the most original Scottish thinker of the period, was well placed to assess the nature and significance of these developments. In a letter to a friend, for example, the publisher William Strahan, in August 1770, he asserted that “I believe this is the historical Age and this the historical Nation”.⁵ The sense of patriotic pride here is palpable. Moreover, that the judgment was offered in a candid private communication

¹ Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, (ed.) E. Dilworth (Indianapolis, 1961), p. 25.

² D.B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh, 1556–1889* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 64.

³ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, (ed.) L.M. Knapp (London, 1966), p. 233.

⁴ Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots’ Invention of the Modern World* (London, 2001); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London, 2000), where the same claim, scarcely moderated, encompasses the whole of Britain.

⁵ *Letters of David Hume*, (ed.) J.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), II, 230.

indicates that Hume really did believe what he was saying. But what precisely did he mean? Why had he come to think that the Scots possessed a unique talent for the study of the past? And what might this observation imply about the relationship between contemporary Scottish historiography and the country's own peculiar history and circumstances? These are important questions to consider if we wish to understand the contribution made by the Scots to the development of historical scholarship in the long eighteenth century.

Existential Anxiety and Scotland's Useable Past

As Hume well knew, historiography already had an exceptionally long and complex history in Scotland, stretching back at least as far as the ninth or tenth centuries when the Mac Alpin dynasty had first created Alba, the entity which later became the Kingdom of the Scots. This fact mattered greatly to Hume and his contemporaries. Above all, it emphasised to people who were themselves coming to terms with the unknown implications of the Anglo-Scottish Treaty of Union of 1707 that their nation had always been a furiously contested construct. Scotland had in fact struggled from the beginning to assert its autonomy against the expansionist English monarchs who dominated much of the rest of Britain. And from the earliest times, owing to various accidents of migration, conquest and cultural assimilation, what became Scotland had also lacked convincing internal coherence. Accordingly, the creation and control of a plausible narrative about the historical experiences of the kingdom's inhabitants had been of acute importance to ambitious rulers in search of an effective common identity.

The dominant ethnic group in early Alba actually called themselves "Scots", and, as is obvious, they ultimately gave their name to the entire kingdom. Yet, crucially, it was widely acknowledged that they were not even natives: speaking a distinct Celtic language known as Gaelic, the Scots were initially confined to the west coast and, according to their own histories, imaginary or real, which Hume himself unhesitatingly embraced in the 1760s in remarking that they had "first been established in Ireland", were actually recent arrivals.⁶ By contrast, the Picts, a non-Gaelic-speaking Celtic people who had accepted Mac Alpin rule by the mid-ninth century,

⁶ David Hume, *History of England*, 8 vols. (London, 1763), I, 12.

were the earliest known principal occupants of the future Scotland. They in turn were closely related to all the other native Celts of mainland Britain, including the inhabitants of Alt Clut or Strathclyde in the south-west, who spoke a language akin to Welsh and were only finally absorbed by Alba in the eleventh century. Similarly the Lothian region, later home to Scotland's capital and the region from which Hume and most of the other leading figures of the Enlightenment hailed, had remained until the same period part of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria: its people's English tongue eventually permeated Scottish society, of course, and, confusingly, was even re-named "Scots" in that context; but it also ensured enduringly problematic affinities between a core area of Scotland and the dominant anglophone culture of southern Britain. Adding to this troublesome mix for Alba was one further ingredient. For the colonisation of the north and west by Norse-speaking Vikings from the ninth century onwards made the task of forging one nation and one people, with one identity and one history, much more urgent but also even more difficult.

Scottish historiography, as eighteenth-century scholars fully appreciated, had thus originated precisely in order to help address these twin problems of extreme internal diversity and powerful external threats. The solution involved brandishing the partly-legendary Gaelic pedigrees of the Mac Alpains to underline their unquestionably royal status. It also meant the elaboration of much broader historical narratives justifying their claims to sovereignty over all of their expanding territories. This is surely why what are today the first surviving works recognisably belonging to Scottish history, the Old Irish tenth-century *Senchus Fer n-Alban* (The History of the Men of Scotland) and the Latin so-called *Chronicles of the Kings of Alba*, dating from the start of the eleventh, blend exact-seeming monarchical genealogy with a putative history of an entire people.⁷ The enduring importance of such combinations to Scotland's identity is also why Enlightenment historical scholarship would itself begin with an extraordinary attempt at re-casting the early history of the Scots and their kings; and why even at the end of the eighteenth century a subsequent generation would yet again feel the need to engage in bitter wrangling over the exact relationship between the Scots and the Picts.

⁷ Dauvit Broun, "The Picts' Place in the Kingship's Past before John of Fordun", in Edward J. Cowan and Richard Finlay, (eds.), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 11–28.

This rich tradition of thinking and talking about the history of Scotland, at first conducted mainly orally, yielded in due course the earliest substantial written accounts of the country's past to which the Enlightenment would eventually devote concerted attention.⁸ The *Declaration of Arbroath*, written at the eponymous abbey in 1320 by allies of King Robert I to repudiate English claims to overlordship, could therefore take for granted a fully-developed history of the Scots and their royal line. In the Arbroath text the Scots had not merely crossed the narrow seas from their Irish homeland. They had actually originated in the eastern Mediterranean, where the Greek warrior-prince Gathelus, progenitor of the Gaels, had married an Egyptian princess called Scota. Moving on to Spain (more precisely, Galicia), they had then migrated first to Ireland and subsequently to Scotland, where a recognisable kingdom had been founded by one Fergus MacFerchar as early as 330 BC. The same discrete political entity had then not only survived Roman incursions but also emerged strong and free under a much later Fergus, surnamed MacEarch, in the fifth century AD.⁹

This tale of unimaginably ancient origins, clearly well-established and authoritative even by the time of the Bruce, was subsequently related at length by the country's first identifiable historian, John of Fordun, an Aberdeenshire chantry priest who composed the *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (Chronicles of the Scottish People) during the second half of the fourteenth century, and by Walter Bower, another cleric, whose *Scotichronicon*, a recension of Fordun, was apparently begun in 1440. Eighteenth-century historians were in fact the first not to take Fordun and Bower entirely at face value: Hume's friend William Robertson, Principal of the University of Edinburgh by the 1760s and an eminent historian in his own right, said rather equivocally of Fordun that "as no recourse could be had to more ancient records, it supplied the place of the authentic annals of the kingdom".¹⁰ These texts were not, however, without their uses to Enlightenment scholars. Indeed the first modern printed edition of the *Scotichronicon* was published in 1759, the very same year as Robertson's

⁸ Alexander Grant, "Aspects of National Consciousness in Medieval Scotland", Claus Bjørn, Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, (eds.), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen, 1994), pp. 68–95.

⁹ W. Mathews, "The Egyptians in Scotland: Political History of a Myth", *Viator*, 1 (1970), 289–306.

¹⁰ William Robertson, *History of Scotland*, 2 vols (London, 1759), I, 4.

comment, by Walter Goodall—Hume's assistant while the philosopher oversaw Edinburgh's Advocates' Library.

In the two centuries following the compilation of these major narratives, Scottish historiography also felt the impact of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Higher levels of literary sophistication were slowly introduced, ultimately modelled on Livy and Tacitus and on modern Italian and French exemplars. A key indication of the progress being made was the *Historia majoris Britanniae tam Angliae quam Scotiae* (History of Greater Britain, as well England as Scotland) (1521) by John Mair, a scholastic logician previously at the Sorbonne—"a succinct and dry writer", thought an underwhelmed Robertson—whose long years away from his homeland (he even had it published at Paris) seem to have eventually made possible a novel and strikingly detached account which emphasised the similarities between the two insular kingdoms and called boldly for their political *rapprochement*.¹¹ Appropriately, since the obvious advantages of Anglo-Scottish co-operation were also an ideological commonplace for most scholars living in the first post-Union age, Mair's remarkable text was republished in Edinburgh by the printer Robert Freebairn in 1740, the very year in which Hume's first work also entered the world and which modern historians have often seen as marking the chronological beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The sixteenth century, however, also produced other significant histories like Hector Boece's *Scotorum historia* (1527) and especially George Buchanan's great *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* (1582). The latter in particular afforded an ideologically-charged account in which Scotland's monarchs appeared to have been elective and therefore legitimately removable by the nation's political leaders in the event of malfeasance: the pertinence of this literally revolutionary historiography to the constitutional contentions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain explains why Buchanan's text was ordered burned by the University of Oxford as late as 1683; why Thomas Ruddiman, Hume's predecessor at the Advocates', was still wrestling with its arguments in polemical work published in the late 1740s; and doubtless also why Hume himself provocatively included several cross-references to the *Historia* in his own *History of England* (1754–62).¹² Yet

¹¹ Ibid., I, 4; Roger Mason, "Kingship, Nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union: John Mair's *History of Greater Britain* (1521)", *Innes Review*, 41 (1990), 182–222.

¹² J.H. Burns, "George Buchanan and the Anti-Monarchomachs", in Roger Mason, (ed.), *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 138–58.

it was not what had changed in the telling of the nation's story by these highly able humanists but rather what had remained the same that was perhaps most striking. For the basic outline of Scottish historiography, from Egyptian origins via the heroic MacFerchar to successfully-defended independence under the Bruce, had continued largely unaltered even by Buchanan—certainly embellished and beautified but not seriously challenged or subjected to critical scrutiny.

Even the white heat of Scotland's violent Reformation after 1559, which re-forged so much else, did not significantly affect it. Some details were altered, to be sure: the human focus in accounts of Scottish history shifted understandably from soldiers to saints and from princes and peers to preachers and prophets. Committed Protestant historians like John Knox and David Calderwood, clergymen directly involved in the successful establishment of the Calvinist theological revolution in Scotland, predictably concentrated on scouring the past for apparent anticipations of their own reforms as well as on enumerating the sins of a supposedly alien Catholic hierarchy that had gradually imposed itself upon a population which had previously, they insisted, sustained religious practices with a distinctively proto-Protestant character. But the fundamental outline of Scotland's history that was widely accepted by Scottish scholars remained unchanged deep into the seventeenth century—and, because of its defining role in the nation's identity for the best part of a millenium, not merely unchallenged but to all intents and purposes unchallengeable.¹³

Doubt and the Enlightened Historian

As if to reinforce this point, the eighteenth century opened not with encouraging signs of a new willingness to question the received historiography but with yet another attempt to exploit it in defence of contemporary claims for Scotland's antiquity and autonomy.¹⁴ The occasion was the political controversy surrounding the negotiation of the Treaty of Union. And it was fears that England might consider this process as securing merely the overdue return of an errant province that generated James Anderson's *An Historical Essay showing that the Crown and Kingdom*

¹³ David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh, 1993), cap. 2.

¹⁴ William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh, 1999), esp. caps 8 and 9.

of *Scotland is Imperial and Independent* (1705), with its self-explanatory title, and Sir James Dalrymple's *Collections Concerning the Scottish History* (1705). Crucially, neither author opposed the Union as such. But both were patriotic lawyers with a professional interest in the accurate exegesis of documentary records. Accordingly they insisted that the mediaeval evidence of their country's civil and ecclesiastical independence proved that any new relationship between the kingdoms needed to result from respectful and even-handed negotiations between equals. Anderson even incorporated a key text of the conventional historiography by providing a translation of the *Declaration of Arbroath* as part of his work.¹⁵ An approving Scots Parliament duly voted him a cash prize for his timely deployment of historical scholarship in the national interest.

The attack on this entrenched view of Scotland's past, soon afterwards, was therefore in no sense a purely academic critique of an outdated myth-history. On the contrary, the Enlightenment's arrival in historiographical terms was marked by the courageous repudiation of a native scholarly tradition, widely regarded as yielding an accurate account of the nation's past, that had until relatively recently retained potent topical resonance.¹⁶ It helped that Thomas Innes, the man responsible, was in many ways an outsider, able to generate much-needed perspective on ideological claims in which he had significantly less personal investment. For the doubts about the veracity as well as about the supposed meaning of key parts of Scotland's historiography that led Innes to publish the *Critical Essay Concerning the Ancient Inhabitants of Scotland* (1729) undoubtedly arose to a great extent from the fact that he was an ordained Catholic priest and Jacobite sympathiser located, as Mair too had originally been, in Paris.¹⁷

It was this that encouraged Innes to target Buchanan's account in particular, with its tendentious depiction of tyrannous ancient kings held accountable for their mis-rule—a narrative that, as a supporter of the exiled Stuart dynasty which had been expelled in 1688–9 by modern politicians drawing on explicitly Buchananite arguments, Innes was already strongly predisposed to reject. Paris also offered convenient proximity to an intriguing cache of mediaeval Scottish manuscripts brought there

¹⁵ James Anderson, *An Historical Essay showing that the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland is Imperial and Independent* (Edinburgh, 1705), Appendix XIII.

¹⁶ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. caps 3 and 6.

¹⁷ Colin Kidd, "Antiquarianism, Religion and the Scottish Enlightenment", *Innes Review*, 46 (1995), 139–54.

for safe-keeping at the Reformation by a fleeing Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow (though Innes, benefiting from the dawning of religious toleration in Enlightenment Britain, was also able to return home to consult supplementary primary sources). A further advantage enjoyed by Innes in France was exposure to Jean Mabillon's scholarly influence: this gave him knowledge of advanced philological and palaeographical techniques that proved crucial for authenticating, dating and interrogating the surviving manuscript sources.

Innes' approach was essentially that of a detective, not only revealing where historiographical crime had been perpetrated but also identifying those whom he believed to be the guilty parties and laying bare their dishonest motives. This was how Scotland's first forty kings—indeed the entire national story between Gathelus and MacEarch—came to be finally unveiled as almost certainly a work of fiction. Innes's archival endeavours confirmed that the earliest known manuscripts contained no mention. They also showed that the received names for these ostensibly Gaelic patriarchs actually hinted at their having been assigned in a much later Latin-using period. Helpfully, this incriminating circumstance fitted well with the obvious need for late-mediaeval chroniclers to exaggerate the antiquity of the Scottish monarchy in order to rebut English claims of immemorial suzerainty: Innes duly realised that this was when the conventional accounts of Scotland's early history had probably been invented. Similar reasoning led him to conclude that the detailed royal biographies from the first several hundred years of Scottish history must also have been concocted, probably in the aftermath of King James III's deposition and murder in 1488, because they provided all-too-convenient constitutional precedents for the forced removal of a delinquent ruler. As he summarised his stunning findings, "...at the bottom all the story of these remote antiquities, that is, of the forty kings of the Scots in Britain before Fergus son of Erch, are, if not absolutely fabulous, at least entirely uncertain and groundless...".¹⁸

Not that Innes's scepticism when confronted by unverifiable historical claims about Scotland's early history was completely all-embracing. In fact, he was no less committed than Buchanan or Anderson to a specific set of beliefs about the country's origins for which secure documentary evidence was, to say the least, extremely patchy. In particular, he was

¹⁸ Thomas Innes, *A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain, or Scotland*, 2 vols. (London, 1729), II, 758.

convinced, and argued powerfully to this effect, that Scotland's political roots lay not among the immigrant Gaels but in a monarchy first established by the native population: the Picts, he claimed, rather than the Scots, were "the most ancient and most valiant inhabitants of Britain", and it was they who had been equipped with a fully-fledged line of early kings.¹⁹ It may well be this more credulous aspect of his work and his consequent status as one of the eighteenth century's first "Pictomaniacs" that best explains Innes's slightly unfair later relegation to the status of mere "antiquary" and the relatively limited role that he has played in many modern accounts of the Scottish Enlightenment, which have tended to begin, in historiographical terms, with David Hume.

If anything, however, the modern reader is likely to be struck not by how much documentary evidence Hume himself insisted upon to reinforce his own historical claims but rather by how little.²⁰ Certainly, like several other prominent Enlightenment historians—Gibbon and Voltaire often face the same charge—he devoted less effort to filling the pages of the *History* with dense references to primary sources than most current practitioners would perhaps consider necessary and certainly than a man indissolubly linked with a radical form of philosophical doubt might have been expected to exhibit. Yet Hume's sceptical attitude shone through nonetheless. Above all he believed that the absence of sufficient proof for many widely-credited interpretations of the past called for greater caution from the reading public. This was particularly the case with regard to the dominant Whig historiography: in Hume's view, partly reflecting his philosophical scepticism but also the fact that, as a Scot, he was able to approach the verities of pre-Union English history as an outsider, Whig propaganda had dangerously perverted the people's understanding of England's past. Indeed, like the exile Innes, he seems to have concluded that a series of imaginary ideas about previous events had been consciously assembled, and were still being peddled, by cynical historians whose motives for doing so actually lay largely in their own contemporary political commitments.

Accordingly the authorial voice in the *History* frequently indicated Hume's measured doubts about specific historical claims that, as part of the Whiggish orthodoxy, would ordinarily have been accepted unquestioningly by most of his contemporary British readers. The Reformation,

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 165.

²⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 2011).

for example, was not a great leap forward in the history of English liberties, pushed through by far-sighted Protestant preachers and pious laymen energised by a sincere passion for religious freedom: in truth the latter had simply “cast a wistful eye on the church revenues, and hoped, if a reformation took place, to enrich themselves by the plunder of the ecclesiastics”.²¹ Mary, Queen of Scots, too, for Buchanan a strumpet and a tyrant who had opposed the emergence of constitutional monarchy and Protestant liberty, required particular re-thinking by Hume. In the event she became, although still deeply flawed and intrinsically dangerous, to some degree a victim of philistine fanatics like John Knox. Hume evidently enjoyed condemning the latter for his intemperate zeal and belittled Scotland’s greatest reformer deliciously as a “rustic apostle”.²²

Charles I, meanwhile, was not the absolutist despot bent on enslaving the English and Scottish peoples that so many of Hume’s contemporaries still imagined. Rather he was a more complex and much-misunderstood figure. Unlucky at least as much as he was malicious, he had been opposed by fanatical enemies whose repellent bigotry mocked those eighteenth-century Whigs who enthusiastically claimed them as honoured predecessors: “The character of this Prince”, insisted Hume with ostentatious even-handedness,

as of most men, was mixed; but his virtues predominated above his vices; or, more properly speaking, his imperfections: For scarce any of his faults rose to that pitch as to merit the appellation of vices. To consider him in the most favourable light, it may be affirmed, that his dignity was free from pride, his humanity from weakness, his bravery from rashness, his temperance from austerity, his frugality from avarice: All these virtues, in him, maintained their proper bounds, and merited unreserved praise. To speak the most harshly of him, we may affirm, that many of his good qualities were attended with some latent frailty, which, though seemingly inconsiderable, was able, when seconded by the extreme malevolence of his fortune, to disappoint them of all their influence: His beneficent disposition was clouded by a manner not very gracious; his virtue was tinged with superstition; his good sense was disfigured by a deference to persons of a capacity inferior to his own; and his moderate temper exempted him not from hasty and precipitate resolutions. He deserves the epithet of a good, rather than of a great man; and was more fitted to rule in a regular established government, than either to give way to the encroachments of a popular assembly, or finally to subdue their pretensions.²³

²¹ David Hume, *History of England*, 2 vols. (London, 1759), I, 245.

²² *Ibid.*, II, 437.

²³ David Hume, *History of England*, 8 vols. (London, 1763), VII, 150.

Such penetrating characterisation, explaining what had truly animated key individuals and why their personal experiences had eventually unfolded as they did, was a potent selling-point for Hume to his mid-eighteenth-century audience, their tastes and expectations increasingly influenced by the new sense of interiority and psychological intimacy offered by the novel as a fashionable literary form.²⁴

As for the 1688–9 revolution on which the British constitution of Hume's day rested and which the Whigs fondly imagined to be their own special achievement, it too looked strikingly different in Hume's telling. It was definitely not the noble act of public-spirited statesmen. It was instead the messy outcome of short-term deals struck for a variety of reasons by both Whigs and Tories in the peculiar circumstances of the late 1680s. As a result, Hume's readers were encouraged to think of their own freedoms as contingent as well as surprisingly recent in origin—as the product more of accident than of design and therefore as all the more precarious. Certainly there was little basis for the hegemonic narrative which saw liberty as the pre-ordained outcome of benevolent Whig politicians working as the agents of divine providence. Indeed such fantastical accounts, “the representations of faction” as Hume dismissively called them, were not only without evidential foundation.²⁵ They were positively dangerous, for they were little more than self-serving propaganda designed to provide cover for present-day political manoeuvring. As he summarised matters in a blistering denunciation of what passed for received historical wisdom about James II and VII's removal, “this event, which has been advantageous to the state, has been destructive to the truth of history, and has established many gross falsehoods, which it is unaccountable how any civilized nation could have embraced with regard to its domestic occurrences”.²⁶

Again like Innes, however, Hume was not interested simply in erasing the accumulated illusions and delusions built up by previous historians. He also had his own rather more constructive agenda in mind. For his antidote to the continuing dangers of intolerance and partisanship in contemporary society was an emollient Enlightenment prescription of politeness and sociability which would be facilitated by the study and informed discussion of history. In fact, the *History*, just like his shorter essays, was intended to stimulate conversational exchange, reasoned

²⁴ Karen O'Brien, “History and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain”, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), 397–413.

²⁵ Hume, *History* (1763), VIII, 312.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 313.

argument, improved understanding, and, in the final analysis, mutual respect: “extremes of all kinds are to be avoided”, wrote Hume in addressing again the problematic historiography of 1688–9, “and tho’ no one will ever please either faction by moderate opinions, it is there we are most likely to meet with truth and certainty”.²⁷ This was why skewering the dishonest misrepresentations and ending the ceaseless party cant were so important: the task of historical revisionism actually created the perfect opportunity to promote a new discourse about Britain’s past and present in which a sensible and detached perspective could be adopted on key events and institutions and in which contemporaries would finally be able to see themselves for what they truly were—the fortunate beneficiaries of complex historical processes that previous generations had rarely if ever perceived clearly, let alone successfully controlled or consciously directed.

The reception of Hume’s *History* was, perhaps, the ultimate proof that there is no such thing as bad publicity. Widely condemned from the outset for its slaughtering of Whiggism’s sacred cows and its audacious assault on the sanctity of the Protestant Reformation, it established itself as a consistent historical best-seller for most of the next hundred years and remained the standard work in its field until Macaulay. Readers who did not share Hume’s views, in America and Europe as well as in Britain, nonetheless considered it an indispensable guide. In practice they quickly learned to separate the author’s honeyed prose, engaging wit and profound historical sense, to which they invariably became addicted, from the disturbingly cynical conclusions that, it transpired, could largely be set to one side. Happily for the other leading Scottish historians who were Hume’s personal friends, however, this was not a problem that they ever faced. None matched Hume for humour or for purposely controversial revisionism. Their scholarship was less concerned with advancing the forces of scepticism against the redoubts of traditional narrative than with developing a new analytical framework within which historical change could itself be understood and explained. Not coincidentally, this—and not Hume’s troubling attack on interpretative orthodoxy—would eventually come to be seen as the defining intellectual achievement of Scottish Enlightenment historiography.

²⁷ Ibid., VIII, 313.

Man and Nature Conjectured

The best starting point for thinking about the peculiar eighteenth-century Scottish contribution to the study of historical change may well be the words of Dugald Stewart, professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh and both the disciple and hagiographer of several of the great Enlightenment historians.²⁸ For in a biographical essay on Smith, he observed that his subject's approach to understanding the past had really been a species of "*Theoretical or Conjectural History*".²⁹ These terms have perplexed recent scholars who have found it difficult to identify the gist of the argument: for example, are "conjectural" and "theoretical" exact synonyms or do they indicate variant characterisations and mask significant differences of emphasis? One thing, though, is clear. Stewart's chosen vocabulary confirms that Smith and his colleagues were recognised very quickly by contemporaries as having developed a new type of historiography marked by a strong abstract or conceptual content informed by essentially philosophical concerns. Indeed, the phrase "philosophical history", preferred by some contemporaries as well as by many later commentators, has plausibly been seen as describing the central intellectual project of the Scottish Enlightenment as a whole.

It is Robertson who best represents the impact of this development upon the composition of historical narrative in particular.³⁰ His first great work, the *History of Scotland* (1759), was in one sense merely a popular account of his own nation's turbulent past, especially in the sixteenth century. But it also sought consciously to reflect the strongly sceptical stance in relation to accepted orthodoxy that had already distinguished Innes and Hume. Previous historians who had treated this period were described in very derogatory terms:

Blinded by prejudices, and heated by the part which they themselves had acted in the scenes they describe, they wrote an apology for a faction, rather than the history of their country. Succeeding historians have

²⁸ Michael Brown, "Creating a Canon: Dugald Stewart's Construction of the Scottish Enlightenment", *History of Universities*, 16 (2000), 135–54.

²⁹ Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, (ed.) Dugald Stewart (London, 1795), p. xlii; Harro Höpfl, "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment", *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1978), 19–40; Roger L. Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers", *Canadian Historical Association Papers* (1984), 63–90.

³⁰ D.J. Womersley, "The Historical Writings of William Robertson", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986), 497–506.

followed these guides almost implicitly, and have repeated their errors and misrepresentations.³¹

Thus licensed to despatch the vapid imaginings of his credulous predecessors, Robertson delighted in being able to cleanse the sullied reputation of Mary, Queen of Scots, in particular:

Mary's sufferings exceed, both in degree and in duration, those tragical distresses which fancy has feigned to excite sorrow and commiseration; and while we survey them, we are apt altogether to forget her frailties; we think of her faults with less indignation, and approve of our tears, as if they were shed for a person who had attained much nearer to pure virtue.³²

This was striking stuff indeed coming from the country's most senior Presbyterian cleric and clear evidence that the Enlightenment's core values of reason and intellectual freedom were transforming both the tenor and the tone of long-established historical judgments.³³

Robertson's *Scotland*, however, was philosophical in a still deeper sense. For he set out to show how only an appreciation of social and economic circumstances could properly explain historical developments. Most revealingly, he evolved a systematic criticism of Scotland's native political culture between the Mac Alpíns and the seventeenth century, emphasising how in a fragmented country an over-mighty feudal aristocracy and a peculiarly weak monarchy had constrained individual freedom and, particularly as compared with England, inhibited the emergence of the necessary parliamentary and legal institutions. As he lamented:

Many years after the declension of the feudal system in the other kingdoms of Europe, and when the arms or policy of princes had, everywhere, shaken, or laid it in ruins, the foundations of that ancient fabric remained, in a great measure, firm and untouched in Scotland.³⁴

At an ideological level, as Robertson well knew, this analysis powerfully reinforced Unionist identities, confirming that the Treaty of 1707 had finally rescued the Scots from their own benighted past: the liberty which they now enjoyed was a late but vigorous transplant from the neighbouring kingdom's more fertile soil. Intellectually, however, this was a widely-applicable sociological perspective in which the conventional historical

³¹ William Robertson, *The History of Scotland*, 2 vols (London, 1759), I, iv.

³² *Ibid.*, II, 151.

³³ Mary Fearnley-Sander, "Philosophical History and the Scottish Reformation: William Robertson and the Knoxian Tradition", *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 323–38.

³⁴ Robertson, *Scotland*, I, 32; Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997) cap. 4.

narrative—above all in Scotland the constant battles between monarchs and nobility—could be illuminated and amplified by reference to deeper-lying structural features of human existence in particular conditions.

The *History of Scotland* was followed over the next twenty years by two other major works in which Robertson showed that the same explanatory framework could be applied fruitfully in a range of quite different contexts. In the *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769) the reader was treated not to a straightforward biography of sixteenth-century Europe's charismatic imperial figurehead but rather to a sophisticated interpretation of the Continent's historical development since antiquity.³⁵ Indeed, the work's narrow titular focus was widened at the outset by an extended introductory essay entitled "A View of the Progress of Society in Europe". This started with a sweeping sociological analysis of the moral and material factors leading to the fall of Rome and the triumph of those "hardy and enterprising" tribes whose invasions had established the "feudal policy and laws" that had survived into the sixteenth century.³⁶ It continued with a magisterial examination of the social and economic factors shaping subsequent medieval politics, so that the narrative of Charles V's life in the remainder of the work, once the diligent reader encountered it, rested on a foundation of existing understanding about the structure of European society and politics that no previous sixteenth-century historian had ever offered.

The same innovative approach characterised Robertson's third major work, the *History of America* (1777). Originally conceived as part of a larger study but published early (and, it turned out, alone) because of heightened public interest in what its author diplomatically called "the present state of the British Colonies", this work again utilised the now-familiar sociological perspective to explore pre-Columbian America and its astonishingly rapid penetration by Iberian interlopers.³⁷ The interactions between landscape, climate and human development, important causal factors for Enlightenment theorists like Montesquieu, helped Robertson explain the nature of native American society to his enthralled readers. Savage people had inhabited an equally savage country, he suggested, in contrast with the more conducive lands hitherto known to Europeans:

³⁵ Neil Hargraves, "The 'Progress of Ambition': Character, Narrative and Philosophy in the Works of William Robertson", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63 (2002), 261–82.

³⁶ William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, 3 vols. (London, 1769), I, 8; I, 13.

³⁷ William Robertson, *The History of America*, 2 vols. (London, 1777), I, 5.

... in the new world, the state of mankind was ruder, and the aspect of nature extremely different. Throughout all its vast regions, there were only two monarchies remarkable for extent of territory, or distinguished by any progress in improvement. The rest of this continent was possessed by small independent tribes, destitute of arts and industry, and neither capable to correct the defects, nor desirous to meliorate the condition of that part of the earth allotted to them for their habitation.³⁸

His reconstruction of primitive American society and culture also gave Robertson the confidence to venture "conjectural" interpretations of other early societies from pre-history. Underlying this was the premise, closely related to the Enlightenment belief in mankind's common nature, that peoples must generally pass through similar experiences as they progress towards advanced civilisation: as he explained the implications of this startling assumption, "The character and occupations of the hunter in America, must be little different from those of an Asiatic, who depends for subsistence on the chase. A tribe of savages on the banks of the Danube, must nearly resemble one upon the plains washed by the Mississippi".³⁹ Robertson's humane and sympathetic portrayal of the tribes of the New World thus ultimately rested on the moving and utterly convincing proposition that their lives could actually be identified directly with those of his modern British readers' own remote ancestors: "A human being", he reiterated, "as he comes originally from the hand of nature, is every where the same".⁴⁰

If Robertson's histories still operated to some extent within a narrative framework but also injected into it dynamic elements of philosophical explanation, then other Scottish scholars by the 1760s were increasingly willing to abandon traditional historiographical formats altogether. Robertson's friend and colleague Adam Ferguson, who held the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh before Stewart, epitomised this more expansive and experimental approach to the study of historical change.⁴¹ Indeed the stronger emphasis upon conceptual analysis that this enabled has encouraged some modern students to identify Ferguson, not entirely helpfully, as a "founding father of social science", above all for the *Essay on the History*

³⁸ Ibid., I, 257.

³⁹ Ibid., I, 268.

⁴⁰ Ibid., I, 401; Alexander Du Toit, "Who are the Barbarians?: Scottish Views of Conquest and Indians, and Robertson's *History of America*", *Scottish Literary Journal*, 26 (1999), 29–47.

⁴¹ David Allan, *Adam Ferguson* (Aberdeen, 2007).

of *Civil Society* (1767).⁴² This work certainly offers a striking contrast to the writings of other revisionists like Innes and Hume. For although Ferguson's rhetorical brilliance made its prose mellifluous and intensely readable, the *Essay* not only lacked any recognisable chronological form. It even failed to engage directly with Scottish history at all, making a deliberate point of developing what was intended to be a plausible general account of human history without reliance on the parochial experiences of the author's own country or one small group of familiar historical actors. As he wrote, as if to encourage his readers' identification primarily as human beings engaged in society rather than as private individuals inhabiting particular times and places, "Mankind are to be taken in groupes, as they have always subsisted. The history of the individual is but a detail of the sentiments and thoughts he has entertained in the view of his species: and every experiment relative to this subject should be made with entire societies, not with single men".⁴³

Like his friends Hume and Robertson, of course, Ferguson was adamant that his work was to be understood as resting solidly on empirical foundations. Great emphasis was placed on its status as a product of careful historical study rather than of wild speculation—hence his dismissal of "these boundless regions of ignorance or conjecture" in which abstract philosophical principles too often supplied accepted wisdom about man's nature and origins.⁴⁴ This stance was adopted chiefly because Ferguson had a target in mind: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to whose central claim in *Du contrat social* (1762), that man had been born into an unblemished primitive state from which a long history of misfortune had torn him, he took extreme exception. Indeed, as for Hume, this radical proposition, to which other leading European theorists of the Enlightenment also seemed attracted, was for Ferguson both imaginary and dangerous. It rested on the view that there were credible historical grounds for believing in a human "state of nature" marked by blissful innocence. Yet there was in truth not a single shred of plausible evidence for this assertion. As a result, the related conclusion that man's subsequent conduct and character, including up to the present time, was fundamentally a denial of his natural propensities—that man's history, so to say, was itself definitively unnatural—was entirely without empirical foundation.

⁴² D. MacRae, "Adam Ferguson", in T. Raison, (ed.), *The Founding Fathers of Social Science* (London, 1969), pp. 27–35.

⁴³ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1767), p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

In challenging this insidious argument the *Essay* permitted Ferguson, who, coming from a background in the Scottish Highlands, was unusually sensitive to the wide diversity of human social and cultural norms, to develop a full-blown version of what other scholars like Hume, in writing specifically about the evolution of religious beliefs, had termed “natural history”.⁴⁵ In other words, the study of history here became more or less coterminous with the study of human nature as revealed through the species’ varied experiences—whether these happened to lie in ancient Athens and Sparta, in Ferguson’s native Gaelic-speaking Perthshire, in the Scots-speaking wynds and closes of Enlightenment Edinburgh or indeed in the remotest reaches of the known non-European world. As he eagerly pointed out in a famously panoptic passage that effectively condensed much of human history, this meant that man’s natural social state and moral character were in fact universal and ubiquitous and so on display wherever and whenever human beings lived out their particular histories:

Man finds his lodgment alike in the cave, the cottage, and the palace; and his subsistence equally in the woods, in the dairy, or the farm. He assumes the distinction of titles, equipage, and dress; he devises regular systems of government, and a complicated body of laws: or, naked in the woods, has no badge of superiority but the strength of his limbs and the sagacity of his mind; no rule of conduct but choice; no tie with his fellow-creatures but affection, the love of company, and the desire of safety. Capable of a great variety of arts, yet dependent on none in particular for the preservation of his being; to whatever length he has carried his artifice, there he seems to enjoy the conveniencies that suit his nature, and to have found the condition to which he is destined. The tree which an American, on the banks of the Oroonoko, has chosen to climb for the retreat, and the lodgement of his family, is to him a convenient dwelling. The sopha, the vaulted dome, and the colonade, do not more effectually content their native inhabitant.

If we are asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? we may answer, It is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan. While this active being is in the train of employing his talents, and of operating on the subjects around him, all situations are equally natural.⁴⁶

Again this was a view of the function and potential implications of the study of history that, although nowhere better expressed than by Ferguson, was broadly shared by others in his Scottish circle. And none of these was

⁴⁵ David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 2 vols. (London, 1772), II, 407.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Essay*, pp. 11–12.

to prove more influential in his theoretical analysis of the human past than his close friend Adam Smith.

Stadial Theory and Legal Positivism

Conventional as it is to place Smith's work alongside Ferguson's, a more revealing perspective on his historical philosophy may be afforded by situating it alongside Hume's.⁴⁷ For as well as writing the *History* which brought him celebrity and wealth, Hume had earlier composed a series of highly-original political and economic essays in which a wider theory of historical development had been sketched out. Again derived from an empirical methodology that claimed to spurn the merely imaginary and to be exclusively "founded on history and experience", Hume's account of man's progress, expressed particularly clearly in "Of Commerce", emphasised the formative role of environment and material conditions.⁴⁸ Like Montesquieu, he insisted that landscape shaped history, helping determine the scope of potential human experience: southern European poverty, for example, was "owing to the superior riches of the soil and happiness of the climate" making labour and innovation less necessary, whereas England's population, living further north, ultimately benefitted from cultivating a "coarse" soil which rewarded long-term investment and careful stewardship.⁴⁹ Such arguments are a reminder that Smith's fascination with the material factors that seemed to facilitate human development was no peculiarity but rather a consequence of a determination to explain Scotland's own contemporary transformation through agricultural improvement, oceanic commerce and manufacturing—an obsession which he understandably shared with several of his closest Edinburgh friends.

Yet Smith, for all the similarities with Hume, was undoubtedly singular in the manner in which his own theory of progress had apparently developed. This is clear in particular from what can be reconstructed of the jurisprudence lectures that he developed during his time as professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow in the 1750s and early 1760s, the surviving

⁴⁷ E.g. J.R. Weinstein, "The Two Adams: Ferguson and Smith on Sympathy and Sentiment", in Eugene Heath and Vincenze Merolle, (eds.), *Adam Ferguson: A Reassessment, Philosophy, Politics and Society* (London, 2009), pp. 89–106.

⁴⁸ Hume, *Essays and Treatises*, I, 267.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 277.

records of which were neither discovered nor published until long after his death. Here it was that Smith first announced his conclusion that law and social convention were the critical vectors through which changes in the way in which life's necessities were produced came to affect almost every other aspect of existence. It was this insight, probably influenced by Smith's French studies, which also provided the basis of his famous four-stage historical system, again announced to the same Glasgow audience, by which humans were said to evolve successively from "the Age of Hunters" to that of shepherds and then on to agriculture and finally commerce.⁵⁰ At each stage the changing mode of subsistence obliged the evolution of ever more complex legal and political structures and so of different social relations and cultural attributes: in shifting from hunter-gathering to pastoralism, for example, notions of mobile property had first arisen and had led to the emergence of appropriate legal procedures, while the subsequent advent of domesticated crop cultivation had entailed the creation of systems of formal landownership and hence of the much more sophisticated social structures and types of governmental machinery which that had made possible.⁵¹

It is in this context that Smith's project in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) makes greatest sense. For it was his determination to explain long-term social change through essentially material factors, already evident in the jurisprudence lectures, which gave rise to the full range of historical concerns seen in his masterwork. This is the obvious background to other aspects of Smith's understanding of the history of progress, such as the so-called "theory of unintended consequences".⁵² Having its roots in the analysis of economic motivation, the theory maintains that key developments occur as a result of the unforeseen wider benefits of the instinctive behaviour of myriad individuals. On this reasoning the health and wealth of societies depends on actions springing from the "self-love" of ordinary people going about their private business rather than from the public-spirited altruism of the morally-superior few:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We

⁵⁰ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, (ed.) R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael and P.G. Stein (Indianapolis, 1982), p. 14.

⁵¹ P. Bowles, "The Origin of Property and the Development of Scottish Historical Science", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46 (1985), 197–209.

⁵² Craig Smith, "The Scottish Enlightenment, Unintended Consequences and the Science of Man", *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 7 (2009), 9–28.

address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.⁵³

It is thus the intrinsic human desire for material betterment which “comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go into the grave” that provides the motive force for improvement.⁵⁴ Our psychology, or “human nature”, in short, is for Smith the driver behind large-scale historical change.

This tendency to see progress in terms of natural human instincts acting within specific material contexts and then calling forth firstly a series of concomitant legal and political developments and secondly a whole range of consequential social and cultural responses was widely adopted elsewhere in Scotland’s intellectual community. Henry Home, for example, known as Lord Kames from his professional courtesy title, was probably the greatest literary figure among enlightened Edinburgh’s ferociously-intellectual judges and he was one of several to attempt to push further the wide-ranging historical implications of the connections between legal systems and prevailing social and economic conditions. In *Historical Law Tracts* (1758) Kames described the historical evolution of legal systems as a feature intrinsic to mankind’s steady advancement from rudeness to refinement. Finally understanding law in this way, he claimed, would render it at last “a rational study, when it is traced historically, from its first rudiments among savages, through successive changes, to its highest improvements in a civilized society”.⁵⁵ In *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774) he subsequently offered a full-scale account of the key aspects of human development within a coherent four-stage classification of society’s historical formation—hunting, shepherding, farming and trading—that was closely related both to Robertson’s philosophical analysis and to Smith’s familiar materialist scheme.

Other Scots followed Kames’s lead in delving deep into the origins and nature of legal and political systems as direct reflections of a society’s distinctive composition and material circumstances. His younger protégé Sir John Dalrymple, a lawyer and landowner, wrote *An Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property* (1758), which, with a quotation from Montesquieu (who had read it in unpublished draft) on the title page and

⁵³ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (London, 1776), I, 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 415.

⁵⁵ Lord Kames, *Historical Law Tracts*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1758), I, v.

a personal dedication to Kames, applied similar assumptions to explain the archaic system of property ownership still prevailing in Scotland which for lawyers influenced by the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment appeared increasingly anachronistic and indefensible. This was also a particularly pressing topical problem because the two quite different legal traditions retained under the terms of the Treaty were one of the greatest remaining obstacles to seamless Anglo-Scottish integration in the decades after 1707. Worse, the arcane peculiarities of Scots law, baffling to English legislators at Westminster, actually hindered mutual understanding between the peoples: as Dalrymple argued, “until the subjects of England and Scotland have a knowledge of each others laws, there never will be a perfect union of the two kingdoms.”⁵⁶

Smith's own Glasgow pupil John Millar, who later became a professor at their *alma mater*, was also close to the elderly Kames, and it was from the formidable combined influence of these mentors that there came forth a striking approach to the study of society that would push the Scottish Enlightenment's theoretical developments to their conceptual limits.⁵⁷ Most of all, Millar's *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771) was perhaps the first serious study of the development of social relations and the changing distribution of power. That Scottish society itself was now experiencing dramatic internal re-structuring—driven by commercial growth and incipient industrialization and increasingly leading to the emergence of stronger class identities and new political tensions—and that slavery in particular was at the centre of a heated moral debate made Millar's intellectual achievement in exploring the history of inequality in human communities all the more pertinent to the concerns of his original Scottish audience. More widely, these insights into the economic foundations of social structure and thus into what Millar, following Hume and Smith, had begun to conceive of as a comprehensive “natural history of mankind”, ensured him and his fellow Scots an attentive hearing from nineteenth-century European materialist philosophers like Marx and Engels.⁵⁸

Yet the lawyers of the Scottish Enlightenment, who played such an important part in the cultural and intellectual life of Edinburgh in mid-century, did not confine themselves to writing the history of legal systems

⁵⁶ Sir John Dalrymple, *An Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property* (London, 1758), p. viii.

⁵⁷ Knud Haakonsen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 154–181.

⁵⁸ John Millar, *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (London, 1771), p. vi; Allan, *Ferguson*, cap. 6.

and exploring their specific social and economic determinants. Broader narratives of national history and the long-term development of particular peoples also remained possible, especially where political structures and changing systems of government seemed able to provide the basic framework. The versatile Millar was active in this field too. A liberal Whig who initially supported the French Revolution, he published the *Historical View of the English Government* (1787), dedicated to the iconic Whig reformer Charles James Fox, as an antidote to Hume's sceptical version of events, supplying instead an account that emphasised relentless constitutional progress over aeons of time and highlighted what Millar regarded as clear evidence for an immemorial English commitment to political liberty:

By what fortunate concurrence of events has a more extensive plan of civil freedom been established in this island? Was it by accident, or by design, or from the influence of peculiar situation, that our Saxon forefathers, originally distinguished as the most ferocious of all those barbarians who invaded the Roman provinces, have been enabled to embrace more comprehensive notions of liberty, and to sow the seeds of those political institutions which have been productive of such prosperity and happiness to a great and populous empire?⁵⁹

The project of Scottish scholars contributing to modern British historiography was in this profoundly Whiggish view largely reducible to explaining the origins of the constitutional principles that had triumphed in 1688–9 and showing how they could be preserved, or even extended further, in the face of contemporary threats.

An earlier work along broadly similar ideological lines was *An Historical Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the English Constitution* (1768) by Gilbert Stuart, which, like Millar's study, could certainly be read as a critique of Hume.⁶⁰ It developed a radical Whig interpretation of early English history in which the country's later traditions of common law and parliamentary representation, eventually inherited and fully shared in by the Scots from the Union onwards, were shown to have originated in the communal decision-making of the Anglo-Saxons and the freedom-loving instincts of their tribal ancestors in the German forests. Yet Stuart was also able to apply the same interest in the history of legal systems to his native country, where it seemed for many centuries to have been a less uplifting story. In his *Observations Concerning the Public Law and the*

⁵⁹ John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government* (London, 1787), p. 5.

⁶⁰ William Zachs, *Without Regard to Good Manners: Gilbert Stuart, 1743–1786* (Edinburgh, 1992).

Constitutional History of Scotland (1779), it was Scottish institutional evolution that came under careful scrutiny, fuelled by a desire to understand its continuing problematic distinctiveness: “when we know our public law, and our constitution”, promised Stuart, “in their first rudeness, and in their progressive conditions of refinement, we shall be able to dispel this uncertainty, and arrive at simplicity and science”.⁶¹

In some ways the finest example of “simplicity and science” in the forensic study of the past, however, was the scholarship of Sir David Dalrymple, a distant relation of Sir John and a judge known on the Edinburgh bench as Lord Hailes. In the two-volume *Annals of Scotland* (1776–9) he set an outstanding legal mind to work sifting through the surviving written evidence for his country’s history between the eleventh and late fourteenth centuries, when the Scots’ freedom from English overlordship had finally been confirmed under the Bruces. The result was a noticeably spare and spartan text. Short on literary padding and rhetorical flourishes, it was extremely long on precise footnoting and marginal annotations that, unlike Hume’s *History*, tied Hailes’s self-consciously plain prose narrative to a vast range of sources, among them certain passages in Fordun, Boece and Buchanan but also numerous original documents, including many charters, letters and statutes. Praised by Dr Samuel Johnson—not normally one of Scottish history’s most ardent proponents—for its exceptional methodological rigour and strenuous commitment to distinguishing truth from fiction, the *Annals* marked another important step towards the careful citation and cross-checking of authentic historical records that scholars in the next century would eventually take for granted.

Sentimentalism and the Sense of Place

That an Enlightenment was underway in the middle decades of the eighteenth century was acknowledged by many of Hume’s contemporaries: modern scholarship has tended to focus upon Kant’s philosophical probing of this question in the celebrated 1784 essay “Was ist Aufklärung?”, but instances of a similar awareness developing among the Scots—most commonly utilising the slightly smug formulation “this enlightened age”—can

⁶¹ Gilbert Stuart, *Observations Concerning the Public Law and the Constitutional History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1779), p. vii.

be found at least as far back as the 1750s.⁶² It was Gilbert Stuart, however, in referring admiringly in 1780 to “this enlightened age of philosophy and reflexion” as a bulwark against superstition and intolerance, who perhaps best captured the sheer excitement felt in some quarters at the potentially wide-ranging impact in Scotland of what would later come to be known as the Scottish Enlightenment.⁶³ And nowhere was this optimism about the breadth of the intellectual advances that might be possible more justified than in the field of historiography, where the methodological innovations and new agendas associated with Hume, Robertson, Ferguson and Smith were steadily transforming the ways in which other writers thought about and wrote about the past.

One dimension to the Enlightenment that has only recently attracted significant attention was the widespread emulation of the writings of the famous Edinburgh literati across a range of quite different historical subjects: this proliferation of similar-looking studies was undoubtedly another part of the context to Hume’s claims on behalf of “the historical Nation”, since in the same letter to Strahan he had gone on to confide that he currently knew of “no less than eight Histories upon the Stocks in this Country”.⁶⁴ Urban historiography, achieving unprecedented popularity in England, was very obviously affected by the interest in social and economic change encouraged by theorists like Smith and Ferguson and it expanded accordingly, focusing and reinforcing local pride and civic identity. Several scholars—notably the hair merchant and antiquarian William Maitland and the failed lawyer Hugo Arnot—produced well-regarded histories of Edinburgh which strove for the same sceptical judgmentalism as Robertson and Hume, using it to cast a quizzically enlightened eye back over a communal history that had previously been marked by unseemly turbulence and embarrassing backwardness. The country’s fast-emerging commercial and industrial hub benefited from the same process, both John McUre and John Gibson writing histories of Glasgow that, in the latter case, also contextualised its dramatic recent growth by reference

⁶² Early Scottish examples include the anonymous *The Usefulness of the Edinburgh Theatre Seriously Considered* (Edinburgh, 1757), p. 6, where the phrase was used sarcastically as part of an ironic mock-defence of the city’s burgeoning stage; and straightforwardly in one of Lord Hailes’s minor works, *Historical Memorials Concerning the Provincial Councils of the Scottish Clergy* (Edinburgh, 1769), p. 26.

⁶³ Gilbert Stuart, *History of the Establishment of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland* (London, 1780), p. 206.

⁶⁴ *Letters of David Hume*, II, 230.

to the progressive assumptions of stadial history: "I have endeavoured to fix the aeras, and ascertain the causes", proclaimed Gibson, encouraging his Glaswegian readers to identify themselves with the very latest stage of human development, "from which the rise, progress, and present state of the city have flowed."⁶⁵

County histories similarly appealed, and, often written by literary-minded clergymen with a well-developed sense of local identity, were again able to take on the characteristic socio-economic inflection of Scottish Enlightenment historiography. William Nimmo, for example, ably slotted his own county, Stirlingshire, into the long material development of Scotland: presenting it as an illuminating historical microcosm of the country as a whole, he claimed that "There are few shires in Scotland where monuments of antiquity are so frequently to be met with; neither does it yield to any in point of modern improvements, especially those which tend to the advancement of commerce and manufactures."⁶⁶ Lachlan Shaw, an Elgin minister, published a history of Moray, a distinctive and historically-important region, once the Pictish heartland, which he described with particular attention to its geography and natural environment as factors shaping its inhabitants' historical experiences. George Ridpath, yet another minister, this time a bookish cleric from Roxburghshire whose diary provides us with some of the best anecdotes of contemporary rural life, thrust his own region into the spotlight in the *Border History of England and Scotland* (1776), a posthumously-published work that highlighted the key role played by this long-contested zone in the conflicts which had resulted in the physical delineation of the two neighbouring kingdoms.

If local studies often contrived to bring together the parochial and the stadial, another important dimension to the Enlightenment's broader impact on historiography, clearly assisted by broader contemporary currents, was a new approach to narrative. Pioneered by Robertson in parts of the *History of Scotland*, the new tone of authorial voice that emerged also reflected the growing popularity of the novel as a literary form that actively sought to manipulate the experiences of readers. Usually described as sentimentalism, in so far as it affected historical writing this development not only involved a pronounced stress upon the psychological and cultural origins of individuals' behaviour but also encouraged authors to seek to cultivate empathy and increase identification between modern

⁶⁵ John Gibson, *The History of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1777), p. vi.

⁶⁶ William Nimmo, *A General History of Stirlingshire* (Edinburgh, 1777), p. 1.

readers and those who had lived in the past.⁶⁷ Gilbert Stuart himself, for all his disagreements with Robertson, was perhaps the most outstanding exponent: a journalist in public life and an unrestrained hedonist in private, Stuart's many critics probably had good cause to think that he was particularly well placed to tug shamelessly on the heartstrings of the most susceptible members of the public, especially women.

In *A View of Society in Europe, In its Progress from Rudeness to Refinement* (1778) Stuart accordingly gave extensive coverage to gender relations and the manners of medieval people, promoting identification with them by underlining the gentility and polite values that he insisted they had shared with his own eighteenth-century readers while also accepting that in other respects they had operated in an intriguingly different historical context. A typically over-blown passage on knightly conduct nicely illustrates Stuart's preoccupation with portraying past behaviour in the warmest and liveliest of colours at the same time as pitching such discussions at the tender feelings of female readers in particular:

The knight, while he acquired, in the company of the ladies, the graces of external behaviour, improved his natural sensibilities and tenderness. He smoothed over the roughness of war with politeness. To be rude to a lady, or to speak to her disadvantage, was a crime which could not be pardoned. He guarded her possessions from the rapacious, and maintained her reputation against slander. The uncourteous offender was driven from the society of the valiant; and the interposition of the fair was often necessary to protect him from death. But the courtesy of the knight, though due in a peculiar manner to the female sex, extended itself to all the business and intercourse of civil life. He studied a habitual elegance of manners. Politeness became a knightly virtue; it even attended him to the field of battle, and checked his passions in the ardour of victory...⁶⁸

Much the same strategy of appealing strongly to the emotional sensibilities of his readers was revealed when Stuart returned specifically to the history of his own country in two consecutive titles, the *History of the Establishment of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland* (1780) and the *History of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation till the Death of Queen Mary* (1782), in effect an ambitious bid by Stuart to supplant Robertson's study as the definitive treatment of sixteenth-century Scottish

⁶⁷ Mark S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

⁶⁸ Gilbert Stuart, *A View of Society in Europe, In its Progress from Rudeness to Refinement* (Edinburgh, 1778), pp. 66–7.

history. Indeed, he explicitly addressed the increased danger of partisanship that this degree of emotional engagement in an historical narrative clearly posed, after describing one especially affecting episode, the brutal murder of Henry Darnley, Mary's second husband:

It is with pain that History relates such cruel events; but while she melts with human woe, it is her province to be rigorously just. Her weeping eye is the indication of an instructive sorrow; and while her bursting heart, mourns over the crimes, the calamities, and the wretchedness of ages that are past, she records them with fidelity as a lesson to succeeding times.⁶⁹

Mary, too, was comprehensively sentimentalised by Stuart: "Her virtues were great; her misfortunes greater", he simpered after recounting her judicial murder on the scaffold.⁷⁰ By this time such heartfelt narrative strategies were not entirely revolutionary, given that they built on the rehabilitations that had already been attempted by both Goodall, the modern editor of the *Scotichronicon*, and William Tytler, an Edinburgh lawyer and another antagonist of Hume, in detailed vindications of Mary's queenship and personal conduct published in 1754 and 1760 respectively. Yet set alongside the crude and blatant character assassinations of Buchanan and Knox, standard fare in Scotland until the mid-eighteenth century, this re-casting of Mary as an attractive but luckless heroine was nonetheless evidence of just how far historiography had travelled under the impact of Enlightenment ideas.

Women as a whole, traditionally denied status and influence in male-dominated society but also viewed as intrinsically more vulnerable both to external pressures and to their own more potent emotional drives, were, of course, especially ripe for sentimentalisation in this fashion. The English-born doctor and historian William Alexander, educated in Edinburgh and an associate of some of the leading Scottish historians, even composed a *History of Women* (1779) which carried this approach to new heights.⁷¹ While probing the cultural and biological factors shaping female conduct and social roles over time, Alexander again encouraged contemporary audiences—like Hume and Stuart, he was acutely aware that increasing numbers of book-buyers and book-borrowers were women—to identify closely with his subject. Indeed, implying that his own book

⁶⁹ Gilbert Stuart, *History of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation till the Death of Queen Mary*, 2 vols (London, 1782), I, 202.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 384.

⁷¹ Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 68–109.

had a contemporary ideological purpose that deserved widespread female support, he even claimed that a better understanding of women's distinctive historical experiences was a prerequisite for improving their status in modern society:

... in every age, and in every country, while the men have been partial to the persons of the fair, they have either left their minds altogether without culture, or biased them by a culture of a spurious and improper nature; suspicious, perhaps, that a more rational one would have opened their eyes, shewn them their real condition, and prompted them to assert the rights of nature; rights, of which the men have perpetually, more or less, deprived them.⁷²

The interest in manners, behaviour and values encouraged by Enlightenment methodological innovation also stimulated a greater concern for the systematic historical study of cultural activities. Hume's *History* had made sure to consider the condition of the arts and sciences at different periods of English history. Robert Henry, however, an Edinburgh minister, went much further, organising his multi-volume *History of Great Britain* (1768–93) in thematic sections devoted successively to topics like politics, religion, learning and the arts: it was actually in offering his specific support for Henry's endeavours to the publisher Strahan that Hume's private letter greeting "the historical Age" had been composed.

If the eighteenth century generated concerted interest in new historical subjects like gender, morality and culture, as well as in socio-economic development, it nonetheless also re-energised and re-directed older forms of study focused on the gathering and scrutiny of material evidence from the past. Pre-Enlightenment antiquarian instincts, for example, flourished anew, stimulated both by the increased popularity of historical writing in general and more particularly by the sense of quickening contemporary change brought by constitutional developments and by industrialisation which seemed increasingly to threaten formerly-defining features of Scottish life. In the form that would eventually mutate into archaeology, it popularised the study of physical artefacts and historical landscapes: this not only fed into the scholarship of local historians like Nimmo and Ridpath but also emboldened the inquisitive to found worthy organisations like the Society of Antiquaries and the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, both of which emerged around 1780. Another important form of Enlightenment-era collecting, again underpinned by a redoubled

⁷² William Alexander, *The History of Women* (London, 1779), p. 3.

commitment to the gathering of empirical evidence but now focused on preserving and publicising the literary remains of the country's distinctive cultural identity, began, appropriately, with Allan Ramsay and James Watson in the years before and after the Union. Encouraging the searching out, editing and printing of vernacular ballads and poetry, a hundred years later this form of antiquarianism was still going strong, led by Sir Walter Scott and his associates. It would culminate in the formation of the early nineteenth-century text societies—the Bannatyne Club, the Maitland Club and so forth—to oversee the production of invaluable published editions of the vast back-catalogue of Scotland's literary and historical manuscripts.

Fiction, Fraud and Historicity

Literary antiquarianism, allied in a most peculiar way to the swelling aesthetic cult of sentimentalism, also made possible the most controversial episode in the historiographical enterprise at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment. This was the Ossian affair, in which James Macpherson, an Inverness-shire scholar, presented to the world what he claimed were translations of hitherto-lost epic poetry by an ancient Gaelic bard of that name. Their recovery and publication promised Macpherson fame and fortune. For his delighted supporters among the Edinburgh literati, who provided both intellectual validation and financial backing (perhaps because rather than in spite of the fact that most knew no Gaelic), it offered them even more. One possible benefit was the chance for the Scots to bask in the reflected glory of a re-discovered national epic akin to those adorning the literatures of Greece and Rome. Another was the way in which the bard himself—the poetry's true hero—offered gratifying confirmation that an intellectual could be his society's most astute observer, critic and prophet: in this sense Ossian in his time prefigured Hume, Smith and Ferguson in theirs. But, more than this, Macpherson's work fulfilled a specifically historiographical function. For it seemed to supply Scotland in the 1760s with the authentic early history, rooted in the remote Gaelic past out of which it was known to have emerged, which Innes' demolition of the egregious Fergusonian myth had made necessary and Enlightenment stadial history had not yet been able to provide.⁷³

⁷³ Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1988).

That the Scottish Enlightenment's historical interest in primitivism was closely connected with the enthusiastic reception accorded to Ossian is evident from the preface to *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), Macpherson's cleverly-pitched sample text. It was by Hugh Blair, Edinburgh clergyman and professor, close friend of Robertson and influential literary critic:

The public may depend upon the following fragments as genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry. The date of their composition cannot be exactly ascertained. Tradition, in the country where they were written, refers them to an aera of the most remote antiquity; and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves; which abound with those ideas, and paint those manners, that belong to the most early state of society.⁷⁴

The blatant circularity of this argument—using Ossian's work as evidence of how fifth-century Scottish warriors behaved and then deploying this astonishing new insight into ancient conduct as proof that the texts describing it were authentic—seems not to have troubled Blair.

Even more intriguingly, as he made clear in the *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763) that he published in support of *Fingal*, Macpherson's first full volume, the text was seen by Blair as basically documentary in nature, speaking with unusual creative flair and unfeigned candour about the precise historical circumstances of primitive society:

History, when it treats of remote or dark ages, is seldom very instructive. The beginnings of society, in every country, are involved in fabulous confusion; and though they were not, they would furnish few events worth recording. But, in every period of society, human manners are a curious spectacle; and the most natural pictures of ancient manners are exhibited in the ancient poems of nations. These present to us what is much more valuable than the history of such transactions as a rude age can afford—the history of human imagination and passion. They make us acquainted with the notions and feelings of our fellow creatures in the most artless ages; discovering what objects they admired, and what pleasures they pursued, before those refinements of society had taken place, which enlarge, indeed, and diversify the transactions, but disguise the manners of mankind.⁷⁵

The display by Ossian's characters of "high exertions of fancy and passion" and their free use of "picturesque" speech and a "metaphorical style" were therefore not evidence that they had been invented by Macpherson to reflect the contemporary vogue for sentimentalism but just further

⁷⁴ [James Macpherson], *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1760), p. iii.

⁷⁵ Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (London, 1763), p. 1.

proof, within a recognisably stadial paradigm, of the strikingly passionate and imaginative behaviour supposedly characteristic of primitive Scottish society.⁷⁶

Ossian proved both an embarrassment and a triumph. In so far as authenticity mattered—and to some it would always remain the central question—a majority verdict eventually convicted Macpherson of interweaving some disconnected genuine fragments, partly Irish in origin, with mainly new material of his own. Hume certainly smelt a rat (reportedly exploding in private that “if fifty bare-arsed Highlanders should say that Fingal was an ancient Poem, he would not believe them”) but he tactfully maintained his silence in public because his close personal friends were the text’s most vocal defenders.⁷⁷ Ferguson in particular was implicated: as the only Gaelic speaker among the literati it was hard to believe that he could have been just another of Macpherson’s innocent dupes and he was duly accused of complicity.⁷⁸ Yet Dr Johnson’s response was indicative of the ultimately more complex and ambivalent reaction that Ossian engendered. Johnson was scathing about Macpherson’s pose as an honest translator, engaging in exchanges with the outraged Scot which at one stage threatened to descend into violence (“I shall not be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian”, shot back the pugnacious lexicographer).⁷⁹ He remained utterly fascinated, though, by the archaic society and culture of the Highlands at which these poems, however unconvincingly, seemed to gesture. Indeed, within a decade of *Fingal’s* appearance this loudest of sceptics had been persuaded by Boswell to undertake an extensive autumn tour around the north and west of Scotland and to write one of his most endearing works about the enlightening experience.

From the early 1760s onwards, Ossian’s popularity as a cultural icon, notwithstanding the reservations about its strict authenticity, marked the irresistible rise of serious scholarly interest in the Highlands, encouraged by the fact that, following the defeat of the last Jacobite rebellion in 1746, the onset of the economic transformation that produced the “Clearances” and the absorption of its leaders into the British elite and its soldiers into

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁷ Bailey Saunders, *The Life and Letters of James Macpherson*, 2nd edition (London, 1895), p. 244.

⁷⁸ Richard B. Sher, “Percy, Shaw, and the Ferguson ‘Cheat’: National Prejudice in the Ossian Wars”, in Howard Gaskell, (ed.), *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 204–45.

⁷⁹ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, 4 vols. (London, 1832), II, 302.

the British army, the region's historic distinctiveness was being rapidly diluted.⁸⁰ A key historiographical contribution was the *Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Antiquities, Language, Government, Manners, and Religion of the Ancient Caledonians, their Posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots* (1768) by John Macpherson, minister of Sleat on the Isle of Skye. Believing that both the Picts and the Scots were longstanding Celtic inhabitants of northern mainland Britain, this Macpherson, no relation but a warm admirer of Ossian's translator, in effect set out to dismantle that part of the old Fergusian narrative which had survived Innes's assault and which still maintained, as even Hume had not demurred, that, in Macpherson's dismissive formulation, "the Scots of Britain have derived their origin from the Irish".⁸¹

The most noteworthy contributor to this debate was the combative John Pinkerton. A talented cartographer as well as yet another trained lawyer, as an historian of early Scotland he was transparently motivated by irrational dislike of all things Irish. Rather than follow Macpherson in effectively making the Scots aboriginally Scottish, Pinkerton addressed the problem of their traditional Irish origins from the opposite direction, insisting, like Innes, that it was in fact the dynamic and industrious Picts who had been the dominant influence in Scotland's formation. But much more than this, in the *Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians or Goths* (1787) he introduced a highly idiosyncratic etymology which purported to show that place name evidence proved that the Picts were themselves of "Gothic" or Germanic rather than of Celtic stock and thus that modern Scots substantially derived their culture and freedoms from ancestors related to the vigorous and successful English instead of to the feckless and contemptible Irish: this strategy actually ensured he would be guilty of gross philological incompetence as well as of overt racism.⁸² John Lanne Buchanan, a Perthshire scholar and Presbyterian missionary in the Highlands whose *A Defence of the Scots Highlanders* (1794) was typical of the animated tone of what had by that time mutated into a thoroughly distasteful ethnological dispute, rightly condemned the "asperity of that author, with the injurious, unsupported, and illiberal reflections

⁸⁰ Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989).

⁸¹ John Macpherson, *Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Antiquities, Language, Government, Manners, and Religion of the Ancient Caledonians, their Posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots* (Dublin, 1768), p. 66.

⁸² Colin Kidd, "Race, Theology and Revival: Scots Philology and its Contexts in the Ages of Pinkerton and Jamieson", *Scottish Studies Review*, 3 (2002), 20–33.

thrown out against the Highlanders in general, and Learned Characters in particular".⁸³

Continued rumblings over the remnants of pre-Enlightenment national historiography, greatly enlivened by the Ossian affair, demonstrably vented unresolved tensions over the place of the Highlands and of the Gaels in modern Scotland. But broader anxieties about Scottish identity as a whole came together in the historical novels of Scott, the first of this genre ever written, whose cultural impact ultimately exceeded even that of Macpherson's artful confections. The *Waverley Novels*' indebtedness to Enlightenment historical scholarship is clear.⁸⁴ Their preoccupation with the rich texture of politics, society and culture in earlier periods of Scotland's history demonstrated how comprehensively the future novelist had absorbed the characteristic scholarly obsessions of late-eighteenth-century Edinburgh—of Hume's "historical Age"—in which he had been reared, with Dugald Stewart himself among his teachers. Scott's shaping by the distinctive historiographical concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment is also evident in the narrative structure of many of the novels. The strongly-drawn contrasts between Highland and Lowland communities in *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1817), for example, echo the familiar materialist classifications of stadial theory, while the threats to civility and order perennially posed by rampant religious intolerance and theological dogmatism are central dramatic themes in *Old Mortality* (1816) and *Heart of Midlothian* (1818) respectively.

What would make Scott's work much the most important part of the intellectual legacy of eighteenth-century historiography, however, was its extraordinary success in re-shaping broader perceptions of Scotland itself. For if the Enlightenment had started with the demolition of the country's older historical identity at the hands of Thomas Innes, it was Scott at its end who turned out to have fashioned a new identity that would enjoy—and still enjoys—disproportionate influence on how Scotland and its people would be imagined. Not for nothing did Victorian commentators joke that the country had been transformed into a veritable "Scott-land": viewing it through anything other than the colourful and profoundly historical distorting prism of the *Waverley Novels*, which made it appear as though it was inhabited by quirky characters living in a conventional hierarchical society occupying an archetypically romantic landscape, soon became all

⁸³ John Lanne Buchanan, *A Defence of the Scots Highlanders* (London, 1794), p. 7.

⁸⁴ James Anderson, *Sir Walter Scott and History* (Edinburgh, 1981).

but impossible, even for many Scots.⁸⁵ In this sense Scotland had indeed finally become “the historical Nation” of Hume’s boast, but not necessarily in the way that the philosopher could have imagined fifty years earlier. A country and a people that, because of Enlightenment historiography, had lost its history and its identity in “the historical Age” had, not entirely comfortably, gained other ones.

⁸⁵ Stuart Kelly, *Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* (Edinburgh, 2010).

10. THE BEGINNINGS OF ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY IN BRITAIN

Noelle Gallagher

The Enlightenment has widely been regarded as a watershed moment in the history of British historiography. It is to this period and place that scholars have traced the origins of what Herbert Butterfield once termed the “Whig” interpretation of history: the tendency to situate past events within a teleological narrative of social progress.¹ The Enlightenment has also been identified as a period in which history became more “objective” or “scientific,” as writers utilized empirical models and methods to transform history from an ancient branch of rhetoric into a modern form of science. It was in this period that Adam Ferguson, John Millar, and Dugald Stewart developed the genre of conjectural or philosophical history, “addressing the problem of how we can conjecture historical change for which no evidence exists by examining the same stage in development for a society where the evidence does exist.”² And it was in this period that the great Scottish Enlightenment historians William Robertson and David Hume published their best-known works, including Robertson’s accounts of Scotland and America, and Hume’s six-volume *History of England* (1754–62).

Within the narrative of British historiographical history, Hume’s work has often been singled out for particular scholarly regard, admired both for its successful adaptation of classical models of historical writing, and for its eminently readable narrative.³ The *History*’s six volumes tracked

¹ Murray G.H. Pittock, “Historiography” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 258; Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931).

² Pittock, p. 263.

³ See Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture from Clarendon to Hume* (Houndmills, 2001), pp. 170–209; Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740–1820* (Princeton, 2000), p. 40. See also Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975); Victor G. Wexler, *David Hume and the History of England* (Philadelphia, 1979); David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds. *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, 1965), pp. ix–lv; David Wootton, “David Hume: ‘The Historian’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 447–479.

social and cultural as well as political and military developments, demonstrating how alterations in morals and manners could prove to be as useful a gauge of historical change as wars and revolutions. *The History of England* also managed to strike a careful balance between scholarly credibility and popular interest, providing a narrative that, while based on research, was not so swallowed up in footnotes as to prove impenetrable to a non-specialist audience. By revising the conventional political argument that England possessed an ancient constitution, Hume's text managed to transcend the deeply-entrenched divisions between Whig and Tory historiography.⁴ And by drawing on a range of different literary techniques, including ironic humour and sentimentality, the *History* managed to appeal to women as well as men, leisure readers as well as students of politics or rhetoric.⁵

What prompted these important historiographical achievements? Was Hume simply an extraordinary thinker, possessed of a genius ahead of his time? Or were there other historians, working alongside or prior to Hume, whose texts helped to pave the way for his and other Enlightenment narratives? Perhaps the best-known English historian of the seventeenth century was Clarendon, whose *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars* was completed in the 1670s and published between 1702 and 1704. But what of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the period between Clarendon's account and Hume's? While many different writers published histories of England or Britain during these decades, the vast majority of these texts were judged as "failures" by the elite critical standards of their time; as a result, the Restoration and early eighteenth century has itself come to be regarded as a period of "weakness in English historical writing," and the works that populate the landscape of English historiography in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have slipped from view.⁶ The result has been to magnify Clarendon's, and more particularly Hume's, achievements—but to do so at the expense of a number

⁴ See Forbes, p. 263.

⁵ On Hume's use of irony, see Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 243; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 54–55; on sentiment, see J.C. Hilson, "Hume: the Historian as Man of Feeling," in *Augustan Worlds*, ed. J.C. Hilson, M.M.B. Jones, and J.R. Watson (Leicester, 1978), pp. 205–22; Phillips, pp. 60–73; Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 60–66.

⁶ See Hicks, pp. 1–22; David C. Douglas, *English Scholars 1660–1730* (London, 1939), p. 25; John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1993), esp. p. 26, pp. 40–41.

of innovative precursor texts. However extraordinary or innovative their features, the most prominent and influential of Britain's Enlightenment histories did not emerge *sui generis*. Quite the contrary, many of the features that we now understand as characterizing British Enlightenment historiography were anticipated by historians working in the early half of the eighteenth century.⁷ The names of these figures—Laurence Echard, William Guthrie, John Oldmixon, James Ralph—are now largely unfamiliar, but their works explored new methods of thinking and writing about the past—methods that characterized the period between Clarendon's history and Hume's as an era of productive, if uneven, historiographical experimentation and change.

The Neoclassical Standards for Historical Writing

History, in the Restoration and early eighteenth century, was a highly unstable genre. In part, this instability resulted from a split between the prevailing critical attitudes towards historical writing and the practices embraced by working historians. Elite critical views on historiography were often heavily influenced by seventeenth-century neoclassical writings on the genre, especially the *artes historicae* of well-known French critics like Pierre Le Moyne and René Rapin. These early modern texts used the examples provided by Livy, Tacitus, Sallust, and other ancient writers to present a restrictive, elite definition of history's features and purposes, and to prescribe criteria for the genre's successful execution.⁸ History, according to manuals like Le Moyne's and Rapin's, was "a continued Narration of things True, Great and Publick, writ with Spirit, Eloquence and Judgment; for Instruction to Particulars and Princes, and Good of Civil Society."⁹ As the form that stood at the top of the neoclassical hierarchy of prose genres, history was grand in its subject matter and in its scale: it presented a detached, third-person narrative that stretched back in time to

⁷ See Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Lanham, 1991). Readers will find in Okie's volume a far more extensive analysis of the political and philosophical connections between early-eighteenth-century and Enlightenment historiography, particularly with respect to developing strands of secularism and rationalism.

⁸ Pierre Le Moyne, *Of the Art of Writing and Judging of History* (London, 1694); René Rapin, *Instructions for History* (London, 1680).

⁹ Le Moyne, *Of the Art*, pp. 54–55; see also Rapin, p. 19; Degory Wheare, *The Method and Order of Reading both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories* (London, 1698), p. 15; Thomas Hearne, *Ductor Historicus*, 2nd ed. (London, 1704–05), p. 119.

reveal the underlying causes behind important public events. Its style was decorous and formal, its subject matter removed from the trivial details of ordinary men's actions and everyday life.

History's broad causal plotline and generic character types were indicative both of the form's elevated classical heritage and of its elite didactic purpose. By neoclassical prescription, history was "Moral Philosophy, cloathed in Examples":¹⁰ its narratives and portraits were meant to serve not only as specific illustrations of virtuous or vicious conduct, but also as the material for extracting universal moral lessons. By tracing important public events back to their causes in the motives and actions of great men, students of neoclassical history were able to use history's examples as a means of regulating their own behaviour. Offering illustrations of the rewards of virtue and the perils of vice, history provided a "school for statesmen," teaching present and future leaders how to avoid the errors of their predecessors.¹¹

Yet while texts like Le Moyne's and Rapin's clearly did exert a defining influence on early modern English historiography, neoclassical models were not incorporated across temporal, spatial, or disciplinary boundaries without tension. Indeed, the disparities between theory and practice in classically-modelled writing often led to lasting divides among those who sided with the "ancients" and those who sided with the "moderns."¹² For critics who shared the historiographical principles of Le Moyne and Rapin, the degree to which contemporary historical writing failed to adhere to the classical model was a source of serious concern.¹³ Where historiographical manuals demanded seemly public subject matter, Restoration and early-eighteenth-century historians increasingly delved into public figures' personal idiosyncrasies and scandalous private lives. Equally, where neoclassical *artes historicae* recommended a broad causal narrative and generic character "types," historiography in practice often focused on individual historical episodes and individual psychological portraits, exploring the specific features and circumstances of men whose

¹⁰ Degory Wheare, *The Method and Order of Reading both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories* (London, 1698), p. 298.

¹¹ George H. Nadel, "The Philosophy of History before Historicism." *History and Theory* 3 (1964), 291–315.

¹² See Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 267–413; *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, 1987), esp. pp. 75–153.

¹³ Hicks, 1. The first footnote to Hicks' book offers an useful list of eighteenth-century critiques of historical writing. See p. 217 n.1.

lives presented a mixture of virtue and vice. Perhaps most problematically of all, where neoclassical history demanded a detached, bird's-eye perspective, early-eighteenth-century historians often focused on the events of the past few decades; as a result, they were easily led from detached historical narrative to topical political debate.

New Readers, New Writers

According to critics like Le Moyne and Rapin, formal history's standards for political detachment and philosophical breadth meant that the aspiring historian had to possess either substantial experience of public life, or substantial knowledge about past events, in order to serve as historical narrator.¹⁴ For the English elite, then, "producing a great neoclassical work meant finding a historian with social standing, leisure, and at least some acquaintance with public affairs"; only someone possessed of these advantages could ultimately be capable of taking on the role of a modern-day Sallust, Thucydides, or Livy.¹⁵ Such criteria were increasingly difficult to maintain, however, within an historiographical culture dominated by the growth of a competitive literary marketplace—an environment that extended the authorship of history to enterprising writers without the social status, leisure time, or experience recommended by *artes historicae*.

Further, it remains open to question how many historians working in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries really did seek to model themselves on ancient examples. French historiographical manuals may have dictated that the elite scholar or retired general was the best instructor of future statesmen, but working historians in this period came from a wide range of educational and social backgrounds, and while many of them reiterated neoclassical commonplaces in their prefaces, some explicitly rejected the notion that an historian's social position or public character might provide the best means of judging the merits of his work. Indeed, the very publication of manuals like Le Moyne's and Rapin's (and their subsequent translation from French into English) presupposed the existence of an audience of would-be historians, who would need just such instruction as these texts provided—instruction that perhaps hadn't been obtained through an elite educational program, or prior experience of public life. Seen as prescriptive rather than descriptive accounts, the

¹⁴ Hicks, pp. 19–20.

¹⁵ Hicks, p. 19.

proliferating *artes historicae* of this period gesture towards the frequency with which—and the degree to which—the elite requirements for historical composition were no longer being met.

Moving from the accounts provided by Le Moyne and Rapin to the claims made by working historians, it becomes clear that at least some commercial writers were dismissive of the neoclassical criteria for their role. Some early-eighteenth-century historians defended their non-elite status as irrelevant, and some even promoted it as an indication of personal or political integrity. The sometime poet, playwright, and political journalist James Ralph, for example, defended his assumption of the privileged position of historian on the grounds that his text possessed a literary merit that would support his pretensions to authority. Questioning the neoclassical practice of judging a work by its author, Ralph insisted that any prejudice he encountered from the critics would be drowned out by the endorsements of a wider reading public:

If there are any, who, from the Poorness of their own Spirits, or the Narrowness of their Capacities, find it impossible to imagine, how any one of their Contemporaries, undistinguish'd with a Title, or undignify'd with a great Office, should be able to sit in Judgment on the Actions of Ministers, Kings, and States; or should presume to exert such Abilities, even if endow'd with them; from their low, dirty Prejudices, I appeal to the Candour and Justice of Posterity, who will disdain to judge by so absurd and chimerical a Standard; And who, if they find a Work to be Sterling, will pronounce it to be such.¹⁶

Despite the tone of defensive pride, Ralph's appeal to public taste over gentlemanly prejudice was indicative of a growing sense of professionalism among historians, a belief that the "sterling" of the text could vindicate the efforts of its "upstart" author. Another journalist-turned-historian, William Guthrie, similarly questioned the focus on authorial *ethos*, declaring that he could manage, despite the lack of both rank and training, to secure the approval of "the great" and "the learned" for his *General History of England* (1744). Although Guthrie had himself been the beneficiary of aristocratic patronage, he nonetheless deferred to a wider public as the ultimate judge of his work.¹⁷ A general readership, he contended, would be more likely to evaluate his text on the lasting grounds of didactic or literary merit than on the ephemeral connections of rank or patronage:

¹⁶ James Ralph, *The History of England: During the Reigns of K. William, Q. Anne, and K. George I. with an Introductory Review of the Reigns of the Royal Brothers, Charles and James*. 2 vols. (London, 1744–46), 1:iii–iv.

¹⁷ See Okie, pp. 172–173.

If [an historian] has merit, the public will rescue him from the necessity of cringing for precarious patronage. If he has not merit, it is not in the power of the great to make his labours live beyond a venal, temporary subscription, for which he must mingle with the perquisited varlets of his patrons; and all he can get, by the friendship of the learned, is, the character of an humble, fawning plagiary.¹⁸

Statements like Guthrie's and Ralph's revealed the confidence with which some writers interrogated the snobbery and elitism of classically-schooled critics. The elevated genre of national narrative was no longer solely the province of the leisured gentleman or the retired general—and historical writing was increasingly open to new social viewpoints and new authorial voices as a result.

In defiance of neoclassical social criteria, writers like Ralph and Guthrie focused less on the experience or eloquence of the historian than on what they perceived as the “merit” of his text—a merit determined in part on the basis of a developing scholarly methodology for the writing of history.¹⁹ Increasingly, writers turned to source materials to validate their authority as narrators, drawing on what many intellectual historians have identified as a “clerical” or “antiquarian” tradition of historical scholarship.²⁰ As the emphasis on documentary evidence increased, the criteria for the writing of the genre shifted from an ideal based on social standing or statesmanly experience to a practical model focused on the historian's access to, and interpretation of, the relevant source texts. Thus, part of Guthrie's authority, he claimed, sprang from his general level of literacy and knowledge: since “Learning, like commerce, now is diffused through many channels,” he explained, an untitled historian might succeed as well as an aristocratic one.²¹ Guthrie claimed an additional right to serve as national historian,

¹⁸ William Guthrie, *A General History of England from the Invasion of the Romans . . . to the Late Revolution in 1688*. 4 vols. (London, 1744–51), i.i.

¹⁹ See F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580–1640* (Westport, 1962); F.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, 1967); Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham, 1979); Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

²⁰ See Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950), 285–315; Levi Fox, ed. *English Historical Scholarship in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1956); D.R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology, and ‘The Light of Truth’ from the Accession of James I to the Civil War* (Toronto, 1990); Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquaries of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1995); Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004).

²¹ Guthrie, i.i.

however, in his ability to find and explicate appropriate documentary evidence: "He is the most incurable of fools, or the most mercenary of men, who shall attempt a history of this kind . . . without placing his chief dependence upon his own industry in collecting, and abilities in using, the proper materials."²² As Guthrie's account suggests, the use of source documents became not only a means of appealing to new empiricist models of thought, but also a means by which middle-class writers could bypass the neoclassical prescriptions for their genre, redefining the ideal leisured historian as a real working researcher.

At the same time as they engaged with source texts, professional historians also engaged with other historians, sometimes presenting their own narratives as compilations or refutations of preceding or contemporaneous historical narratives. Quoted documentary evidence not only enabled working historians to support their own arguments for scholarly authority; it also allowed them to argue for the relative usefulness of their own accounts as alternatives or complements to the other available histories on the market. By engaging directly with one another, professional historians were able to identify potential competitors as well as potential allies in the literary marketplace. The Tory historian Laurence Echard, for example, made extensive use of Clarendon's history in his account of the civil wars, but took pains to differentiate, as well as to align, his own work and Clarendon's in the preface to the text:

I have made bold with that great Man upon all Occasions, as well to skreen and vindicate, as to enrich and ennoble my own Work; for the Benefit of which I have declin'd no Kinds of Liberties. As I have sometimes copy'd, so I have oftner abridg'd him: I have sometimes new-modell'd and methodiz'd him; othertimes clear'd and explain'd him. Sometimes I have confirm'd and vindicated him; and a few Times deserted and contradicted him: And moreover I have often supply'd, and sometimes improv'd him.²³

Echard's claims to have "improv'd" Clarendon, while perhaps betraying an ill-judged self-confidence, exemplified the would-be professional historian's view that no historical narrative was perfect or comprehensive; there was room for more than one history of the civil war, and for more than one interpretation of events. Similarly, Ralph declared in the preface to his text that no single work or writer could provide "all that [was] worth

²² Guthrie, 1:i–ii.

²³ Laurence Echard, *The History of England*. 3 vols. (London, 1718), 2:v.

knowing in the *English* story.”²⁴ Complaining of readers who believed the French historian Paul Rapin de Thoyras “to be the very *Coryphaeus* of Historians,” Ralph listed off a motley chorus of other writers, explaining that he had used all of their works in writing his own text: “*Kennet, Echard, Oldmixon, North, Burnet, &c. &c.*, had each his Followers and Admirers: Something was to be glean’d from every one of them, and much was to be rejected.”²⁵

Although, as Ralph’s remarks suggest, writers were keen to highlight the sources they had “rejected,” every historian from the period inserted material taken from other histories—whether credited or uncredited—into his narrative. Indeed, most late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century histories contained massive amounts of quoted material, with overt citations and marginal or footnoted references frequently crowding out the main text. Ralph’s account had pages almost wholly consumed by footnotes, and both Echard and Guthrie provided marginal glosses detailing the major sources for their narratives.

Within some texts, the new scholarly practices were taken to an even greater extreme, with histories by John Oldmixon and White Kennett incorporating whole pages—even whole chapters—from other histories into their works. These works’ liberal use of quoted material, while often damaging to the continuity and clarity of the narrative, identified the role of the early-eighteenth-century professional historian as a role that was based in part on his relation to other writers who had attempted the same task. Guthrie, for example, clearly recognized his own work’s dependence on the efforts of prior historians: “Very absurd would it be in me, to attempt a new history of what has been so often attempted before, if I did not think myself as well qualified for the task as any preceding historian of the same times, with the advantages of their labours before me.”²⁶ Guthrie’s “Whiggish” view of historiography made him appreciative of his secondary sources, leading him to conclude that his own text, developed with the knowledge of previous historians to hand, must necessarily register some “progress” over prior efforts at writing national narrative.

Some histories from the period were anthologies: the contents of the first volume of *The Complete History of England* (1706), for example, were taken primarily from histories by Milton and Samuel Daniell, with

²⁴ Ralph, 1:ii.

²⁵ Ralph, 1:ii.

²⁶ Guthrie, 1:ii.

additions “writ in Mr. *Daniell’s* Method.” The writer of the *Complete History’s* preface, John Hughes, clearly shared Guthrie’s respect for prior generations of historians; indeed, he championed the history’s anthology format as its primary strength. The works of Milton, Daniell, and others offered “such a Variety of Matter,” he contended, that there could be few readers with “so little Penetration” as not to be able to draw “many proper Reflections, which may be serviceable in private as well as public Life.”²⁷ While elite critics attacked these quotation-laden “modern” histories as mere compilations of documents, writers like John Hughes and William Nicolson continued to champion the practices of compilation and anthology as central to a developing ideal of professional historical practice.²⁸

New Readers, New Reading Practices

As Hughes’ description of a history suitable to “private as well as public Life” perhaps suggests, the broader authorship for historical narrative was developing alongside a broadening readership for it. Because neo-classical history had a discrete practical application, it also had a specific intended audience. If history was designed to provide instructions on statescraft, it was best suited to readers who could apply its moral precepts directly to life’s events. Accordingly, classically-influenced didactic texts restricted the reading of the genre to a small group of elite men: only adults, argued Degory Wheare in his seventeenth-century manual on reading history, were capable of discerning the “Moral Philosophy” behind history’s “Examples”—and only men who had played, or were about to play, some role in public life could profit from the experiences of past political and military leaders.²⁹ Intelligent, educated elites would also be better equipped to tackle Wheare’s lengthy list of recommended texts, and to attempt his programme of “intensive” or active reading—of “gathering the fruits of History” and “disposing them into Cells or Store-houses” for practical use.³⁰

²⁷ John Hughes, “Preface” to *A Complete History of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1706), 1:leafir; on this anthology and the attribution of the introduction to John Hughes, see Levine, *Battle*, pp. 309–319.

²⁸ See William Nicolson, *The English Historical Library* (London, 1696), 1:A1r.

²⁹ Wheare, p. 298.

³⁰ Wheare, p. 20. On “intensive” reading, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy.” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78.

Yet much like Le Moyne's prescriptions for writing history, Wheare's prescriptions for the reading of the genre were increasingly falling by the wayside. However conservative the original principles of Wheare's text, subsequent editions of his manual saw it not only translated out of the gentlemanly *lingua franca* of Latin—it reappeared under the title of *The Method and Order of Reading both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories* in 1685—but also coupled, in a 1698 edition, with a preface by Henry Dodwell that implicitly argued for the modification of some of Wheare's prescriptions. Dodwell “tried to mediate in the contest between the ancients and the moderns,” producing a “curious piece with its very conventional arguments for the usefulness and superiority of classical history.”³¹ Where Wheare restricted the audience for formal history to those with the proper educational background and experience, Dodwell's preface extended the study of history to younger readers. Dodwell also suggested the value of disseminating works in other classical genres to readers lower down on the social scale: “How much more beneficial would it be for the improvement of *Husbandry*,” he asserted, “if either the *Husbandmen* understood *Hesiod*, *Virgil*, *Cato*, *Varro*, *Colamella*, *Palladius*, *Pliny*, and the *Gesponicks*, or Scholars, who understood these Authors, would also examine the *Practice* of our modern *Husbandry*?”³² Much as the practical lessons of classical husbandry might be applied by modern workers, so history's lessons in ethical conduct might be applied by less experienced readers.

While the qualification of neoclassical standards offered in the “Invitation” was a modest one, Dodwell's remarks were nonetheless suggestive of a change in reading demographics: genres like formal history that had once been restricted to an elite audience were gradually becoming available to a new, commercially-minded reading public.³³ The shift was clearly already underway in 1698, and it continued to progress through the early decades of the eighteenth century, ultimately allowing for the increased dissemination both of classical works and of more recently written English historical narratives. Indeed, the subscription lists for many of the formal histories published in the early eighteenth century reveal

³¹ Levine, *Battle*, p. 280.

³² Dodwell, “Invitation to Gentlemen to Acquaint Themselves with Antient History,” para. II (unpaginated).

³³ Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 132–67; Karen O'Brien, “The History Market in Eighteenth-Century England” in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London, 2001), pp. 105–33; Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment* (Leiden, 2009), esp. pp. 38–40, 42–43, 72–73.

substantial non-elite readerships for such texts. *The Complete History of England* (1706), for example, published less than a decade after the prefaced edition of Wheare's manual, listed a heterogeneous array of subscribers, including linen-drapers, merchants, painters, shipwrights, vintners, apothecaries, druggists, bankers, engravers, and surgeons. It also listed five women—only two of these belonging to the peerage—and several men whose names were accompanied by no title or profession.³⁴

Almost certainly, this more diverse readership for historical narrative would have had different aims in mind than instruction in civil or military offices. Accordingly, by the end of the seventeenth century, the "intensive" model of reading advocated by scholars like Wheare was accompanied by a pattern of "'extensive' reading that [followed] little pattern beyond the individual reader's tastes, personal concerns, and daily whims."³⁵ Elite statesmen might still have been reading history "for action," of course—but other readers were almost certainly pursuing other goals. For the socially ambitious, history might have served as a source of "cultural capital": less interested in stocking the mental "store-houses" with philosophical truths than with acquiring elite knowledge, upwardly-mobile merchants might have plumbed historical materials for memorable facts or reflections—material that could be used to cement social or business relationships. Private gentlemen might have studied history to furnish useful material for polite conversation. History's dramatic narratives and character sketches were likely to have been the primary area of interest for leisure readers, including women and children, for whom lessons on statescraft had no application in daily life. These different groups of readers defined the reading of history as a disparate group of practices, rather than as a uniform philosophical exercise. And just as Hume and his contemporaries were to win their public audience by appealing to female as well as male, sentimental as well as scholarly readers, so the historians of the early enlightenment strove to accommodate a widening range of readers and reading styles.³⁶

³⁴ On the female readership for eighteenth-century historical narrative, see Woolf, "A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500–1800." *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 645–79; John Brewer, "Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpen's Reading" in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 226–45; Phillips, pp. 110–14; Towsey, p. 50.

³⁵ Woolf, *Reading*, p. 9.

³⁶ See Phillips, pp. 103–128.

As an object of recreation or as a source of cultural capital, early-eighteenth-century history was subject to consumer considerations like relative economic value. Although histories were still being published in expensive folio volumes, writers of commercially-marketed texts often attempted to provide some justification for the high prices of their works. Ralph, for example, insisted that the purchase of his two-volume history would be a good financial investment, since its total cost would still prove to be far less than the purchase of the materials he had collected and summarized within its covers: "upon the whole, [I] have endeavour'd to form a *Body* of all such Matters as regard the Exercise or Ends of Government, that those who are not Lawyers or Statesmen, or Writers by Profession, might not be under a Necessity to encumber themselves with a whole Library, in order to be acquainted with the several Branches of their own Story."³⁷ Echard similarly advertised his text's convenience and economy, explaining that he had been compelled to publish the work because "as the Case then stood, an Englishman, who desir'd to know his own Country's Story, was oblig'd to read over a Library, rather than a single History, if he expected any answerable Success."³⁸ Ralph's and Echard's characterization of their work as a distillation or summary of an entire "library" was evidently intended to appeal to a readership of aspiring professionals who wanted to acquaint themselves with the key events of English history without unnecessary expenditure of time or money. Similarly, the development of detailed indexes, contents lists, marginal summaries, and other such scholarly apparati would have aided readers less interested in studying a history from cover to cover than in consulting it periodically as a reference work.

Much like economy, entertainment value became an important means of marketing historical texts to early-eighteenth-century readers. Hughes endorsed the *Complete History* on these grounds, observing that

Tho' History wants not the most Solid Arguments that can be to recommend it to the Esteem of all, who wou'd attain a competent Knowledge of Mankind and the Affairs of the World, yet the Pleasure it affords is the general Inducement of its Readers, who for the most part are well enough content if they are but agreeably amus'd.³⁹

³⁷ Ralph, 1:iii.

³⁸ Echard, 1:air.

³⁹ Hughes, "Preface," 1:leafir.

Works like the *Complete History*, Hughes explained, could satisfy a common desire for gossip—"That busie Humour which makes People curious to know what others have done, or are doing, which furnishes common Conversation, and puts every Body upon Enquiries after News"—while also inculcating knowledge in the reader: "whatever be the Motive, 'tis hardly possible but the Time thus employ'd will be rewarded with some real Improvement, and he that reads will have no Cause to complain, if in the Event he find his Judgment encreas'd, tho' perhaps he only intended that his Fancy shou'd be entertain'd."⁴⁰

Echard similarly promoted his work on the grounds of its ability to combine pleasure with instruction, explaining that while his narrative was a long one, he had provided "Resting-Places" at such points "as should be most advantageous for the Ease and Pleasure of the Reader, as well as for his apprehending and retaining the whole subject."⁴¹ Jacobite historian Thomas Carte, grappling with the same medieval source materials that had proved problematic for Milton and were later to stymie Hume, explained that he "[had] done what he could" to render his narrative entertaining, using a lively style so "that it might not appear tedious to the reader."⁴² While some writers did complain of simple-minded readers who wanted "no more than a smooth, even, flowery Tale,"⁴³ most early-eighteenth-century historians seemed to welcome the new leisure readership for history and the opportunities for formal innovation it generated.

Changes in Subject Matter

Not surprisingly, then, the increasingly diverse readership for history coincided with some key changes in the genre's conventional subject matter. While neoclassical criteria defined general history as a large-scale narrative tracing important public events back to their long-term causes, early-eighteenth-century readers were often more interested in historical phenomena that could be related more directly to their own lives. Accordingly, many historians in this period were struggling with the problem of how to depict the recent past. Here the challenges were both textual and

⁴⁰ Hughes, "Preface," 1:leafir.

⁴¹ Echard, 1:aiiv.

⁴² Thomas Carte, *A General History of England*. 4 vols. (London, 1747–55), 1:xii.

⁴³ Ralph, 1:iii. Ralph claims to be quoting Roger North, although North expresses very different sentiments to these in the *Examen* (London, 1740).

contextual: authorial bias and state censorship were always problems for the memoirist or historian if the persons of whom he wrote were still living. The recent past was seen as posing peculiar difficulties for historians, however, in that many of the events of the seventeenth century—the execution of Charles I, the Interregnum, the Glorious Revolution—had no obvious precedent in classical or pre-modern time. Historians often remarked on the unusual or “unparalleled” nature of recent phenomena, struggling to reconcile the new sense of a unique, specific past with a generic and generalizing model of historiography.

For some historians, the unprecedented nature of recent events provided another useful justification for bypassing neoclassical ideals of historical composition. Radical historian John Oldmixon, for example, linked his innovations of subject matter and style to the argumentative thrust of his analysis, explaining that “the History of *England*, during the Period here treated, is an Exception to all Historical Rules, both Persons and Things being the most out of the way of any that were ever thought worth remembrance.” Oldmixon excused his fondness for political commentary on the grounds that the Stuart reigns demanded such assistance, while Hanoverian history had “little need of Political Reflections,” since it was “too full of Action and Glory to suffer any Interruption in the Narration.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Ralph linked his decision to abandon the streamlined narrative of neoclassical history for a more argumentative model on the grounds that the period’s events required it: “It was [initially] my Opinion, that the Business of an Historian was merely to state Matters of Fact in Order of Time, without any Intermixture of Conjectures, Colourings, Reflections, or Inferences of his own,” he explained; “But when I took a nearer Survey of the Period before me, I found it so ill understood by some, and so much misrepresented by others, that I was forc’d to confute and relate together.”⁴⁵

Historians’ attention to topical issues and recent phenomena was particularly evident in the strong constitutional focus betrayed by many of the national narratives from this period. As several critics have noted, histories across the political spectrum, “from John Oldmixon’s radical Whig *Critical History of England* (1724) to Thomas Carte’s scholarly, Jacobite *General History of England* (1747–55) were . . . centrally preoccupied with

⁴⁴ Oldmixon, *The History of England During the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (London, 1730), xvi.

⁴⁵ Ralph, 1:iii.

the country's constitution, rights and liberties."⁴⁶ The constitution often served formal as well as thematic purposes within these documents, operating as a structural device for organizing the narrative, or as a means of defining its argumentative purpose. Many historians identified the revolution of 1688–89 as a particularly important episode in the nation's constitutional history, and writers of vastly differing ideological perspectives used the Glorious Revolution—much as Hume and Millar were to do—as a means of bookending the turmoil and civil strife of the seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Guthrie, Oldmixon, and Echard all concluded their accounts with the 1688 revolution, for example; and Ralph, despite intending his history of the Hanovers to pick up where Guthrie's narrative had left off, began with an "introductory review" of the Stuart reigns that effectually made the Glorious Revolution the separation point between his work's two volumes.

At the same time as early-eighteenth-century historians highlighted the constitution as a structural and thematic focus, they also turned their attentions to a people in pursuit of constitutional rights and liberties. While history in principle was a narrative detailing the lives and actions of great heroes, history in practice often told the story of a broader British public. Several of the period's Whig historians, for example, identified the English populace as an embattled but ultimately victorious underdog: John Oldmixon, dedicating his account "to all true Englishmen," defined his narrative as a cautionary tale in which the past generations of Englishmen battled against, and ultimately overcame, the "Persuasion and Flattery," "restless mutinous Spirits," and "Falshood" that had threatened their religious and civil rights.⁴⁸ More moderate historians gave more nuanced characterizations of the public, with Ralph, for example, moving between sympathetic accounts of the popular sentiment and condemnatory descriptions of mob violence. Certainly, many writers accorded a dramatic role to "the people" within their histories, effectively treating the populace as a single character possessed of unified thoughts and emotions.⁴⁹ Such references evoke the similarly prominent position accorded to "the common people" in Hume's constitutional narrative.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ See Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), p. 12, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Oldmixon, v.

⁴⁹ For examples, see Echard 1:766, 3:741; Guthrie 4:826; Oldmixon, 761; Ralph 2:1063.

⁵⁰ See Harvey Chisick, "David Hume and the Common People" in *The 'Science of Man' in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid, and their Contemporaries* ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 5–32.

While early-eighteenth-century historiography was concerned with “the people” in general, it was also concerned with examining the lives of individual historical figures. The emphasis on individual characters allowed for more complex or flawed portraits than the general “types” recommended by neoclassical *artes historicae*, and early-eighteenth-century historians warned their readers not to expect heroic portraits on a par with those of classical historiography. Ralph made the comparison between the grand heroes of the ancients and the pedestrian figures of modern historiography explicit, carefully managing his audience’s expectations:

[F]or those who, having fir’d their Imaginations with the splendid Actions of the *Greek* and *Roman* Heroes, or who, prompted by their own Honesty, Credulity, or Inexperience in the great World, expected in the Annals of their own Country to feast their Virtues or their Vanity with a Succession of Characters to delight in, and of Exploits to be proud of, and who, on the contrary, are shock’d with successive Disappointments in almost every Page; I must beseech them not to suppose, that I take any Pleasure in aggravating the forbidding Features that I find, or in making Deformity more deform’d: The Poet, who is a Creator, may people his World with Angels instead of Men if he pleases; but the Historian must keep as strictly to the Life as possible.⁵¹

In accordance with its aim to “keep as strictly to the Life as possible,” Ralph’s history frequently explored the complexities of individual psychology, offering nuanced portraits of controversial figures like Monmouth and James II. Ralph concluded his narrative of the Stuart kings, for example, with a long and complicated summary in which he criticized other historians for treating James’ reign “in the Lump” rather than attending to the subtle shifts in the king’s character and situation. Although Ralph’s assessment was far from flattering, his history took pains to highlight the complexity and the disadvantages of the king’s situation, concluding that “many Princes have been as guilty, without being as unfortunate.”⁵²

Focusing on individual characters’ interior lives, enterprising historians were also able to anticipate, to some degree, the sentimental portraiture that became characteristic of some works of later Romantic historiography. Echard’s account invited the reader to sympathize with a weak and vulnerable James II, for example, by dramatizing the king’s discovery of his imminent danger as a moment of tragic realization:

⁵¹ Ralph, 1:iii.

⁵² Ralph, 1:1078.

Upon the Reading this Letter, the poor King turn'd pale, and for a while remain'd speechless and astonish'd: The airy Castle of Unlimited Power, rais'd by the Magick of Jesuitical Counsels, now vanish'd in a Moment; and the misled Monarch, by the Prince's Approach, freed from his Inchantment, found himself upon the Brink of a Precipice; while all his intoxicating Flatterers stood Thunder-struck at a Distance, without daring to lend him a helping Hand, for fear that both He and They shou'd be involv'd in the greater Ruine.⁵³

Psychological weaknesses served as the means of obtaining the reader's sympathy, as Echard depicted a leader "distracted between good and bad Advice, harass'd in his Body, as well as disorder'd in his Mind, and dis-heartned with black and ominous Apprehensions, the Effects of consciousness, as well as Superstition."⁵⁴

Other writers deployed the same sentimental tropes for different political purposes: Gilbert Burnet (and later, Oldmixon) dwelt on the affecting details of Mrs. Elizabeth Gaunt's trial and execution during the bloody assizes, describing how "She laid the Straw about her for her burning speedily, and behav'd herself in such a manner, that all the Spectators melted into Tears."⁵⁵ Ralph echoed many other historians of the period, including Echard and Sir John Raresby, in offering a sympathetic account of Monmouth's fall from a state of privilege to one of destitution:

He had not been in a Bed for three Weeks: Since *Saturday*-Night he had not slept, and after all the Fatigues of the Battle and the Flight, he had receiv'd no other Sustenance, than the Brook and the Field afforded (some green Peas were actually found in his Pocket) and when the Body sinks, the highest Mind will sink with it: Even Kings, themselves, are Men: And he that is proudest of a Throne, if reduc'd to the like disastrous Circumstances, would confess his Mortality, by the like Relentings.⁵⁶

Like Echard's attempts to rouse compassion for James II, Ralph's insistence that "Even Kings, themselves, are Men" invited readers to identify with powerful historical figures, rather than to admire them from a distance.

Treating their task as one of entertainment as well as instruction, some historians introduced subject matter designed to provoke laughter as well as tears, incorporating ironic commentary and amusing anecdotes into their narratives. For Echard, the genre of history did not prove incompatible

⁵³ Echard, 3:888.

⁵⁴ Echard, 3:914.

⁵⁵ Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*. 2 vols. (London, 1724–34), 1:649. Qtd. in Oldmixon, 707.

⁵⁶ Ralph, 1:883.

with more popular forms of literature, as strains of folklore and low comedy were seamlessly incorporated into the narrative of public political events; his depiction of Cromwell, for example, featured one outlandish story in which the future Protector ostensibly rode into the forest to make a deal with the devil.⁵⁷ Similarly, his account of Charles II's flight from the Battle of Worcester "included humourous anecdotes and hagiographic details calculated to be popular."⁵⁸ Oldmixon, while writing in opposition to Echard's account, exploited history's comic potential more fully still, arguing that although he would "doubtless by cavill'd at by the smaller Criticks, for mixing ludicrous Expressions with the Gravity of History," incorporating ironic humour into his narrative was both "the surest way to keep the Reader awake" and an expedient means of instructing him.⁵⁹

New Forms and Genres: Critical History and Brief History

The changes in history's style and subject matter were also accompanied by alterations in its narrative form, as early eighteenth-century historians pushed the genre beyond the boundaries of conventional large-scale narrative. Recent Enlightenment scholarship has demonstrated that there were links between the formal features and the conceptual interests of British historiography in the latter half of the eighteenth century; the historical writing of the Restoration and early 1700s similarly witnessed the development of forms and techniques that reflected its intellectual and cultural preoccupations.⁶⁰ Outside of history proper, there were many different genres of writing used to depict the past, and many of these picked up on the new interests of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century readers.

Critical history was one of many historical forms to register the wide range of competing and conflicting historical narratives in the literary marketplace, offering a kind of annotated bibliography or historiographical overview for a reader trying to navigate the wide array of available texts. While its methodology was academic, the critical history's audience was not limited to scholars. Oldmixon presented his *Critical History of England* (1724), for example, as a work designed to aid a reading public

⁵⁷ Echard, 2:712.

⁵⁸ Hicks, p. 107.

⁵⁹ Oldmixon, xiv.

⁶⁰ See Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*.

that found itself confused by the many contradictory accounts provided by rival historians:

If *Whitlock* and *Rushworth* are true, the *History of the Rebellion* cannot be so. If the present Government is founded on Revolution Principles, and it is in the Interest of *England* to preserve Union and Love among Protestants; the whole Bent of Mr. *Echard's* History lies another way, from the Beginning to the End. What can be more necessary then, than to set People Right in that which most concerns them, their Religious and Civil Liberties, and justify the Proceedings of the present Age, by those of the past?⁶¹

Although Oldmixon acknowledged that his work might interest—and irritate—rival historians, he characterized the text as a consumer guide for the public, designed “to set People Right” by recommending some texts and rejecting others.

Promoting a less prescriptive model for reading history as well as a less restricted readership, Oldmixon ridiculed Wheare’s model for reading history as “a Method which pins a Man down for Life, and would render him entirely useless to himself or the World.”⁶² His own account offered a more practical approach, reducing the hundreds of histories prescribed by Wheare to a more manageable number. Although the *Critical History* discussed general or world histories as well as particular histories of Britain, and although it recommended texts spanning from the medieval period to the present day, Oldmixon placed special emphasis on works with some relevance to contemporary political issues, extending the practical application of history’s lessons to all varieties of reader.

Seen from a formalist perspective, works like Oldmixon’s also represented the farthest extension of the reference-heavy style of formal historical narrative in this period. Comprised almost entirely of summaries and quotations from other texts, the *Critical History* functioned as what we might now call a “meta-narrative,” commenting on the writing of history as a means of constructing an account of its own. Oldmixon, in other words, was attempting to do for history what Sterne was later to do—albeit with much greater success—for fiction.

Histories written in deliberately simple language, or using a catechism-style question-and-answer format, also capitalized on the period’s changing historical readership and historiographical tastes. While manuals like Wheare’s restricted the genre to an adult as well as an elite audience,

⁶¹ John Oldmixon, *The Critical History of England*. 2 vols. (London, 1724): 1:ii.

⁶² Oldmixon, *Critical*, 1:8–9.

newly-available brief histories and “digest” accounts pushed against the claim that semi-literate or inexperienced readers—including children—would be unable to profit from history’s lessons.⁶³ Isaac Kimber’s *History of England . . . Collected from the most impartial Writers, and Digested Into the Most Easy and Familiar Method* (1746), for example, modified the scope of conventional narrative history in order to appeal to a readership interested in acquiring historical knowledge as “cultural capital.” Kimber addressed the work to a broad civic audience, declaring on his title page the aim “to fix the amiable Sentiments of Liberty in the Hearts of the *British* Nation.” Discussing his design more explicitly in the preface, Kimber explained that his account was intended to aid an audience without elite educational backgrounds or elite budgets: the existing histories, he declared, were “either too prolix for the Perusal, or too chargeable for the Purchase of the Bulk of the People of *England*.”⁶⁴ Kimber also recognized that different readers would be reading for different purposes, observing that, just as he had altered the text’s scope, so he had also rendered its language simpler and its narrative less academic:

I imagine, a more concise and plain Narration of Facts, properly connected, to be more generally useful, in some Measure to all, but more especially to those, whose Sphere in Life renders a critical Knowledge of the most minute Circumstances that have occur’d not very necessary, nor indeed possible; whilst the Method observed in Tracts of this Size is more suited to both their Station and Capacity.⁶⁵

Kimber reaffirmed the growing sense of historical writing as suitable for popular reading, opposing his own audience to that of a full-length history. Even “the more learned” reader, however, might benefit from a digest history by using it to “revive his Reading,” Kimber declared; seen in this light, the brief history was an economical means of reviewing knowledge that had been “sought with great Labour and Expence” in prior years.⁶⁶

⁶³ See, for example, Isaac Kimber, *The History of England . . . Collected from the most impartial writers, and digested into the most easy and familiar method* (London, 1746); John Lockman, *A New History of England, in English and French, By Question and Answer* (London, 1729); John Lindsay, *A Brief History of England . . . By Way of Question and Answer* (1748); Anthony Weldon, *A Brief History of the Kings of England, particularly Those of the Royal House of Stuart* (London, 1755). Weldon’s *History*, not as comprehensive as those of Kimber or Lindsay, used the brief history format in order to provide examples of abusive kings throughout English history. Although on one level a polemical pamphlet, Weldon’s history could also be used as a kind of “conversation-starter” or comparison history.

⁶⁴ Kimber, A2r.

⁶⁵ Kimber, A2r.

⁶⁶ Kimber, A2r.

Kimber's text adapted some of the current trends in historiography for an inexperienced or less educated readership, including an attention to constitutional issues and a focus on the recent past. While he sought to avoid "the fetter'd Condition of an Author, who writes of the Times he immediately lives in," Kimber continued his account "down to the Death of the late King George I," using this focus to recommend the work to "*British Youth, who will thereby discover the true State and Interest of their Country, and imbibe a thorough Veneration for its excellent Constitution.*"⁶⁷

Expansions in Formal Historical Narrative: Guthrie and Ralph

Within full-length narrative histories as well, formal experimentation was an important means of exploring new aesthetic and intellectual sensibilities. Among the many writers who attempted the task of composing a national history, William Guthrie and James Ralph have often been identified as historians whose accounts presaged some of the defining literary and thematic characteristics of British or Scottish Enlightenment historiography.⁶⁸ As educated but untitled writers for hire (both had worked as parliamentary reporters), Guthrie and Ralph approached their roles as historians with a certain degree of self-consciousness. They characterized their texts as works designed to appeal to a broad reading public, and made use of literary techniques that exemplified the broader spirit of historiographical experimentation that characterized their age. In keeping with later Enlightenment practices, both Guthrie's and Ralph's histories adopted a secular perspective, and both utilized the research-based model of composition attributed to antiquarian scholarship.⁶⁹ Thematically, their narratives highlighted the broader social, cultural, and economic aspects of historical change; on a formal level, their works sought to engage the reader by introducing "novelistic" techniques like sentimental portraiture.

Like most other histories written in the early eighteenth century, Guthrie's *General History of England* (1744–51) maintained a clear constitutional focus, and, from the very outset of the work, Guthrie highlighted his interest in the progress and development of English society. In the preface to his account, Guthrie defined his principal aim as "to give a general view

⁶⁷ Kimber, iv.

⁶⁸ See Okie pp. 155–94; Forbes, pp. 253–58.

⁶⁹ Hicks p. 155; Okie pp. 164–65.

of our fundamental liberties and constitutions, and to describe the great scenes of action, with the characters of its chief performers, in as warm and animating a manner as possible, without deviating from truth."⁷⁰ In subordinating his work's portraits of "chief performers" on the historical stage to his larger purpose of outlining "our fundamental liberties and constitutions," Guthrie effectively placed the British populace in the position of narrative hero, charting the fortunes of a group that had been kept "from the true knowledge of their natural and positive rights."⁷¹

By focusing his narrative on a group rather than on an autonomous hero, Guthrie was able to emphasize the "less tangible, less personal forces at work in history," tracing important events back to broader changes in economics or manners, and not just to the actions of important public figures.⁷² Describing his narrative in the preface, Guthrie emphasized the role of economic development in driving historical change, avowing that he would take care, "above all things, to mark the progress of the English commerce through its several gradations."⁷³ Guthrie's account accordingly depicted the development of constitutional liberties as the result of a gradual redistribution of the nation's wealth: it was the "great alteration of property" during the reign of Henry VII, he claimed, "which, in effect, completed the durable fabric of our constitution as it now exists."⁷⁴

Guthrie's narrative also highlighted changes to customs and social life. In his account of the Roman conquest, for example, Guthrie contended that Agricola was only able to obtain victory over the early Britons when he recognized that there was "no remedy for this [war] by arms"; rather, the answer lay in a reformation of Roman manners:

He studied the temper of the Britons, and saw how tractable they had become from good usage and the arts of humanity. The same dispositions, he concluded, were implanted in the other people who held out, and that they might be won over by the like means. He perceived, at the same time, an universal degeneracy of manners had infected the Romans in Britain; and was sensible that nothing but a thorough reformation could either revive martial discipline amongst them, or reconcile the Britons to their government. This reformation he had the courage and virtue to undertake.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Guthrie, 1:iii.

⁷¹ Guthrie, 1:ii–iii.

⁷² Hicks, p. 157.

⁷³ Guthrie, 1:iv.

⁷⁴ Guthrie, 1:iv.

⁷⁵ Guthrie, 1:39.

Similarly, Guthrie argued that the Norman Conquest was “brought upon the English nation by defection and disunion among themselves”: the English lacked “that universal expansion of public spirit which ought to make all considerations secondary to the preservation of our country, against a foreign attack. The degeneracy of manners in the English, at this time, had extinguished those sentiments in most of them.”⁷⁶ Guthrie’s text highlighted the socioeconomic factors in the recent as well as the distant past: he defined the Civil War, for example, “in terms of a gulf in manners between London merchants and the royal court that rendered the two interests mutually antagonistic.”⁷⁷ These accounts of the cultural circumstances behind major events disturbed both the streamlined narrative form and the politico-military subject matter demanded by neoclassical *artes historicae*, enabling Guthrie to expand his work’s enquiries beyond the boundaries of an idealized national history.

Guthrie’s text shifted away from the neoclassical focus on great men not only by reformulating the heroic narrative of formal history, but also by appending a series of five “dissertations” that presented in greater detail Guthrie’s arguments for the economic, social, and cultural developments underpinning Britain’s national past. In their form as well as in their content, these dissertations could be said to anticipate the Appendices to Hume’s *History of England*.⁷⁸ Like Guthrie’s main narrative, the dissertations focused particularly on alterations in wealth and in manners, identifying socioeconomic concerns as both a cause and a gauge of historical change. Each dissertation focused on a particular historical period, with the first describing “the History, Manners, Customs, Laws, &c. of the Ancient Britons,” and the second offering a (very idealized) account of the constitutional government introduced into Britain by the Saxons.⁷⁹ The fifth and final dissertation dealt specifically with economic change, reiterating Guthrie’s argument for an alteration in the distribution of wealth after the reign of Henry VII.

The dissertations were remarkable not only for their emphasis on socioeconomic conditions, but also for their comparative outlook: the third dissertation sought to “exhibit a more ample view of the Saxon constitution than appears in the body of the work” in part by contrasting the Saxon

⁷⁶ Guthrie, 1:325.

⁷⁷ Hicks p. 158; see Guthrie, 4:1063–1071.

⁷⁸ Hicks pp. 157–58; on Hume, see Phillips, pp. 52–55.

⁷⁹ Guthrie, 4:1373, 4:1381–1383.

governmental system against that of the invading Normans.⁸⁰ Similarly, the fourth dissertation, a sustained analysis of Scotland's claims to independence, provided a counterpoint to the main narrative of English history. In outlining the projected dissertations in the preface to the first volume, Guthrie proposed an even stronger comparative framework than he ultimately adopted, anticipating that his account of Anglo-Saxon and Norman governments, for example, would offer "an opportunity of balancing accounts between the two people; and of shewing in what respects the nation has been a gainer or a loser by either."⁸¹ Just as the focus on social and economic development in Guthrie's history anticipated the interests of works like Hume's, so the comparative focus of the dissertations presaged the comparative methods that lay behind the conjectural histories of Dugald Stewart and John Millar. Like these Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Guthrie identified the comparison between different nations as a fruitful means of understanding past events. He also situated the progress of English liberties in the context of broader changes across European civilization, presaging the "cosmopolitan" perspective attributed to Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon.⁸² Other early-eighteenth century historians shared this pan-European approach, and polemical narratives like Robert Ferguson's *History of the Revolution* (1706) or, later, John Dalrymple's *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) adopted a similarly Eurocentric perspective in arguing that English politics were influenced, or dominated, by events on the continent.

James Ralph's *History of England* (1744–46), initially intended as a continuation of Guthrie's account, brought the narrative of English social and economic change into the Hanover reigns. While Ralph's text maintained the same constitutional focus as Guthrie's, then, its narrative centred on relatively recent events. This focus on recent history necessarily politicized the work, Ralph explained, causing a breach with neoclassical models for impartiality. While his initial aims in composing the *History* had been "to follow Truth" and "to detect, in order to eradicate, if possible, the Evil of Parties," Ralph confessed that his interest in the events had prevented him from concealing his political commitments: "tho' we call out for

⁸⁰ Guthrie, 4:383.

⁸¹ Guthrie, i:iv.

⁸² On Guthrie's European approach, see Okie, p. 176; on "cosmopolitan history," see O'Brien pp. 56–203.

Impartiality, we are too much concern'd in the Operation to bear it," he explained.⁸³

Yet while Ralph's text did betray an ideological bias, its "Country" political perspective diverged in important ways from both Whig and Tory viewpoints. Ralph was able to "see through the spurious rationalizations" of historians writing for both the Whig and Tory sides, and the *History* has sometimes been identified as "a product of emerging Enlightenment culture" in its ability to move past a contemporary historiographical practice rooted in the myths of party political debate.⁸⁴ Equally, Ralph broke with his contemporaries in rejecting the divine or providential explanations of events that were favoured by historians like Echard. Like its Country political viewpoint, the *History's* secular perspective has been treated as an indication of its "pre-Enlightenment" or early Enlightenment principles.⁸⁵

Like Guthrie's account, Ralph's history extended beyond the traditional politico-military sphere of national narrative in order to showcase other causes and consequences of historical change. The second volume of the work was particularly concerned with economic history, and it linked some of the major events of William's reign to the growth and establishment of modern systems of finance. Ralph attributed many of the actions of the king and his government to a "harpy Spirit of Rapine"—a "Rage for Lucre" that soon after, he lamented, "began to be visible among the People."⁸⁶ Ralph's narrative used specific recent examples to demonstrate how economic developments could spur important social and political changes: he argued that the creation of the Bank of England, for example, had resulted in investors' moving away from trading and manufactures and into "Government-Securities"—a shift that had "produced not only a visible Increase of Usurers and Extortioners, but also a new Species of Deals, (since better known by the Name of Brokers and Stock-Jobbers) who found Ways and Means to grow rich, without any Stock of their own to trade upon, merely, by bringing Buyers and Sellers together, and by making a Prey of both."⁸⁷ Equally, the king's manipulation of the national finances, by making William the "*Lord of the Cash of the Kingdom*," had made him also, "as formerly he was, *Lord of the Soil*," reducing the English populace to the status of "Vassals."⁸⁸ Although Ralph's account sketched a

⁸³ Ralph, 1:1.

⁸⁴ See Okie, p. 160.

⁸⁵ See Okie, p. 160.

⁸⁶ Ralph, 2:485.

⁸⁷ Ralph, 2:485.

⁸⁸ Ralph, 2:1023–24.

pessimistic portrait of an England increasingly controlled by corrupt corporate interests, his narrative was significant for its attention to financial developments about which “the rest of our general Historians say nothing at all.”⁸⁹

On a formal level, Ralph’s text also contained descriptive passages that made use of some of the same literary techniques favoured by Enlightenment historians like Hume. Ralph’s narrative used the interiorized perspective of a sentimental novel in order to provide complex, and sometimes contradictory, psychological portraits of important public figures. His account of James II, for example, challenged the popular dislike of the last Stuart king by shifting in and out of the king’s point of view. Ralph described James’ response to the flight of his daughter, for example, with a nuanced mixture of sympathetic identification and moral judgment:

[T]he first News his Majesty met on his Return to *Whitehall*, was, the Flight of his Daughter; and as this was a more confounding Stroke than any he had hitherto met with, it got the better of all his Constancy; Tears burst from his Eyes; and, in such a Transport as none but a King and Father could fall into, he cry’d out, *God help me! My own Children have forsaken me!*⁹⁰

Sympathizing with James as a man “Overwhelm’d with such an Accumulation of Misfortunes,” Ralph criticized a rival historian for attempting “to extinguish his Compassion” for the king, concluding: “how blamable soever his Majesty’s Government certainly was, it must be own’d, on the other hand, that he suffer’d grievously for it; and that, therefore, whatever other Forfeitures he incurred, he has still a Right to the Tribute of our Commiseration.”⁹¹

As the example of James II suggests, Ralph used this interiorized perspective not only to complicate the Whig-Tory political divide, but also to question a simplistic view of human psychology. His account of the capture of Judge Jeffreys, for example, disturbingly placed the reader in a position of sympathy with this notoriously pitiless figure, who found himself at the mercy of a furious mob:

So dreadfully did his own Insolence and Barbarity recoil upon his own Head; and so much was he to suffer as a Criminal, who as a Judge had brought such Sufferings on others. Every Face that he saw was the Face of a Fury; every Grasp he felt, he had reason to think was that of the Daemon that waited for him; every Voice that he could distinguish in so wild an Uproar,

⁸⁹ Ralph, 2:481.

⁹⁰ Ralph, 1:1048.

⁹¹ Ralph, 1:1048.

overwhelmed him with Reproaches; and his Conscience eccho'd [sic] within him, that he deserv'd them all. In this miserable Plight, in these merciless Hands, with these distracted Thoughts, and with the Horror and Despair in his own ghastly Face, that was the natural Result of all, he was goaded on to the Lord-Mayor; who, seeing so great a Man, whom he had never look'd up to without trembling, brought before him as the worst and most abhorr'd of all Malefactors, fell into Fits, and was carry'd off to his Bed; from whence he never rose more.⁹²

Here, as in the prior passage, Ralph deployed the language of sentiment to disconcerting effect, keeping the sense of identification evoked by his writing in tension with the sense of judgment warranted by Jeffreys' past behaviour. Ralph's interest in the inner lives of characters like James II and Judge Jeffreys exemplified the period's popular fascination with individual psychology—and, like his ability to move beyond the Whig-Tory political divide, it suggested an historiographical sensibility that was more in keeping with future than with contemporaneous writers.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, many of the same features identified as flaws by elite critics of early-eighteenth-century historical writing were to become important features of historical narrative in the latter part of the century and on into the Romantic period. Just as the success of Hume's *History* in 1754 depended on Hume's ability to "adapt the conventions of ancient historiography to the needs of a society whose commitment to commerce and modern manners rendered the task of the historian decisively different from what it had once been," so historians working in the early 1700s were appealing to the interests of a wider consumer readership, offering entertainment as well as instruction within the pages of their texts.⁹³ Writers like Ralph and Guthrie not only challenged an increasingly-outdated neo-classical ideal of historical composition, they also introduced important new ways of thinking about, and representing, the nation's past. The complicating *pathos* and ironic humour that coloured these writers' character portraits would become a predominant feature of nineteenth-century history. Equally, that same constitutional focus that made the Glorious Revolution such a crucial moment for Carte, Echard, Oldmixon, Ralph,

⁹² Ralph, 1:1063.

⁹³ Phillips, p. 40.

and Guthrie would remain central not only in Hume's historical writings, but in Thomas Macaulay's and Edmund Burke's as well.⁹⁴

More broadly, early-eighteenth-century writers' seizure of an authorial role that had theoretically been restricted to the social and intellectual elite helped to pave the way for would-be historians unequipped with the ideal neoclassical prerequisites of social status or political experience. By establishing a role for the historian that was based on the perceived "scholarly merit" of the text rather than on the pedigree of its author, writers like Guthrie and Ralph facilitated attempts by later figures from marginalized groups—including women like Catherine Macaulay and Elizabeth Hamilton—to publish historical writings. However marginal their status in their own time, or in ours, men like Ralph, Guthrie, Oldmixon, and Echard introduced forms and ideas that remain as vital to the British historiographical tradition—and to its development—as those of their Enlightenment successors.

⁹⁴ Phillips, p. 46; O'Brien, p. 57.

11. *PHILOSOPHES*, ANTICLERICALISM, REACTIONARIES AND PROGRESS IN FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

François-Emmanuel Boucher

Many philosophers of the Enlightenment made progress a fundamental concept in their argumentation. A central axis around which diverse thinkers organized universal history on an optimistic trajectory, the concept of progress helped both to establish confidence in a multitude of political and moral reforms and to accord a new vigour to critiques made against systems that hinder human efforts towards the horizon of an ever more glorious future. For those who share this belief, progress authorises an unprecedented enthusiasm for the elaboration of novel hypotheses on the unfolding of history and on temporal finality. If progress promises an irreversible amelioration of the human condition, the future might hold moments of pause, reversals, and hesitancy, but nothing that could fatally hinder the advancement of humanity, this new subject on the march whose nature, movement and destiny are now the things that we must understand.

In the following pages, we will examine the concept of progress in the French eighteenth century by considering its origin, its transformation, and, in our discussion of the French reaction, its recuperation and transfiguration. This notion of progress, however, calls many Christian certainties into question, especially the manner in which Christianity defends a view of human destiny based upon doctrines that, for many *philosophes*, are entirely baseless. Worse, these ideas merely perpetuate the errors that both critical reason and the unfolding of history prove to be both incorrect and deleterious. The question of progress, then, also concerns the question of the value of revealed religion, and the historical role of Christianity since pagan antiquity. Does progress demand a surpassing of religion, or, on the contrary, does it *require* Christianity, as Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, Lamennais and Chateaubriand argued at the end of the eighteenth century? Both polemical and polysemous, the concept of progress is far from a transparent, uniform idea. When we attempt to inquire precisely into its function, we are confronted with numerous problems concerning its relation to history and its operative mechanisms in particular circumstances. It would even be correct to suggest that progress

is not a concept that belongs strictly to the eighteenth century. In its more common usage, it implies neither strict secularization, nor the triumph of reason, nor again the idea of a revivifying happiness that would be brought by the triumph of peace, economic prosperity, etc. While a central concept of the Enlightenment, progress was equally important to theories of the French reactionaries, just as it would be important in the nineteenth century to Saint-Simonian speculations, Fourierite utopias, or Comtian positivists.¹

The Significance of Christianity for Human Progress

Long before the invective of Nietzsche, eighteenth-century writers laid the foundation for the division that would separate progress and revealed religion, by castigating the Christian religion as the babblings of “slaves” or the craze of “mediocre minds” who attempt to turn their sanguinary theories and their unnatural practices into indisputable precepts. “We will see most of all a crowd of prideful doctors and quarrelsome, inflexible men who fan the flames of discord, divide nations with disputes and idiotic subtleties, incite persecution and civil wars among Christians, perpetuate theological hatred, and undermine empires with their continual revolts [...]”² For many, the belief in Christian theology, the expiation of sin, and the renunciation of the flesh and the pleasures of the world appear unjustifiable. For an anticlerical writer like baron d’Holbach, Christianity is an affront to reason; in its rules as in its history, in its institutions as in its exegesis, this religion always finished by extolling ignorance and disdain for reason—in a word, dogmatic error at the expense of knowledge and the sciences. The Christian religion, d’Holbach insists, denies the transfiguring power of human beings, representing them as the impotent slaves of a bellicose and tyrannical God: “The Gospels . . . present us with a confused collection of prodigies, anachronisms, and contradictions, in which criticism loses itself, and which would cause any other book to be rejected with contempt.”³ For him, the Christian religion is to

¹ For a discussion of progress in the 19th century, see Marc Angenot, *D’où venons-nous? Où allons-nous? La décomposition de l’idée de progrès* (Montréal, 2001), p. 68.

² D’Holbach, *Tableau des saints* (Paris, 2008), p. 11. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are ours (the editors).

³ D’Holbach, *Histoire critique de Jésus Christ ou Analyse raisonnée des Évangiles*, éd. facsimilé de la Bibliothèque nationale de France. Reprod. d’une éd. s.l.n.d., [Amsterdam, 1770], p. 15.

be proscribed precisely because of the advancement of knowledge and the progress of human intelligence. Progress and Christianity are opposites. Christianity, d'Holbach insists, carries "all the ancient superstitions born of oriental fanaticism."⁴ "Divinity is represented," he continues, "as a sovereign who is unjust, furious, implacable in his rage, punishing the guilty with neither proportion nor measure and visiting upon innocent children the iniquities of their fathers."⁵

Christianity, in the view of such anticlerical authors, thus encourages antisocial behaviour that undermines any attempt to establish, in the temporal world, mechanisms that would increase human happiness. On account of this perceived devaluing of human nature, disciples of Jesus Christ, to many Enlightenment *philosophes*, break with the temporal order; inevitably, the baron writes, the disciple becomes "either a useless misanthrope or a troublesome fanatic."⁶ In *L'idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée française au XVIII^e siècle*, Robert Mauzi writes that for the thinkers of the Enlightenment, Christianity "tortures man by placing him on a path that runs contrary to his natural destination. In addition, it is empty of any moral ideal, and it rarely coexists with virtue. It carries in itself error, lies, and evil."⁷ Objections to the gospels grew over the course of the century and differ with each author. Insults abound: in addition to being dogmatic and oriental, Christianity is seen as complicated, dark, and exclusionary. Revealed religion condemns almost all of humanity in order to save a miniscule portion that adheres to its dogmas without appearing to understand them or to question their foundations—foundations that only a blind obedience would be able to accept. Such adherence was cultivated over centuries. From the earliest days of the church, the rupture with pagan traditions was made possible by the tenacity of the new proselytes, who were distinguishable from their Roman counterparts by a fanaticism that had, until that point, been inconceivable. A symptom of this intolerance manifested itself periodically throughout the centuries in the tendency to proscribe discussion and divergence. For the anticlerical eighteenth century, these early doctrines were either a series of contradictions that could not be accepted without the reinforcement of institutional

⁴ D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé ou examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne* (London, 1756), p. II.

⁵ D'Holbach, *Le Système social*, t. I, p. 27.

⁶ D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé*, p. IV.

⁷ Robert Mauzi, *L'idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée française au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1994), p. 204.

dogmatism, or worse yet a glorification of madness, of irrationalism. The destruction of Rome and the darkness of the middle ages appeared, in the eyes of these *philosophes*, as proof of the corrosive character of this religion, a religion, these writers repeat, that destroyed one of the greatest civilizing forces in world history.

The concept of progress, as explained by Enlightenment philosophers, not only allows one to believe that history may be fully decoded, but also permits one to determine its causes and diverse obstacles. From Herod Antipas to Theodosius II the Porphyrogenitus, man had not merely distanced himself from ancient rationalism and the riches of pagan philosophy; he had fallen into an insane doctrine from which he is only just beginning to awaken.

The *philosophes* further argued that the establishment of institutional mechanisms that regulate Christian practices and the discussion of a possible redemption went hand in hand with the destruction of liberty of conscience. The power of the church became so great in this period that the emperors no longer had any choice but to bend before it, lest they face revolts.⁸ Thus, in order to grasp the historical significance of Christianity, the *philosophes* chose to focus on the behaviour of the clergy, who appeared much more representative of Christianity than the teachings contained in the gospels themselves.

Amid these numerous practices, monasticism is the phenomenon that provokes the strongest reactions. According to Enlightenment philosophers, the monk, whose form of life and whose negligible contribution to the economy, culture, and science—in a word, to life in general—becomes a detestable being, a parasite, a supreme symbol of Christian charlatanry. It is the monk, writes Voltaire, “who most dishonours the human race.”⁹ What does he do for his compatriots, for his brothers, or for his family? What does he do for the advancement of society? Such assessments, of course, stem partly from perspective. Like Diderot in *La Religieuse*, the *philosophes* do not study the monasteries’ *raison d’être* by looking at the rule of Saint Benedict or the New Testament, but rather judge these institutions on the basis of an entirely different criterion according to which engagement for the world and in the world is the only basis for a respectable life. Ever since the era of the Thebaid, Helvétius insists,

⁸ See Mably, *Observations sur l’histoire des Grecs. / Observations sur l’histoire des Romains* (Paris, L’An III de la République) *Œuvres complètes*. t. IV, p. 578; Helvétius, *De l’homme*, t. I (Paris, 1989), p. 83.

⁹ Voltaire, *Conversation dans les Champs-Élysées*, in *Mélanges* (Paris, 1961), p. 720.

"a monk imposes upon himself the law of silence, spans himself every night, feeds himself with vegetables cooked in water, sleeps on straw, and offers to God his dirtiness and his ignorance."¹⁰ Whether he is a cenobite or a monk, the Christian fanatic is in the thrall of a false illusion as to the value of his mode of existence. Since Helvétius, d'Holbach, Voltaire and Diderot no longer accept the idea that the expiation of sin should be the preeminent divine command, monastic precepts thus lose all their justification and their *raison d'être*. In their view, it is simply illogical to avoid life, to seek suffering, to valorize social inaction, for the theoretical bases on which these moral principles repose are erroneous and increasingly problematic. The lost legitimacy of Christian hermeneutics and its institutional tradition was replaced by another paradigm according to which human nature and history are the bearers not only of another truth, but of human truth. It is hardly surprising, then, that subsequently all that derives from Christianity is attacked so radically. "There is no resemblance between a saint and a virtuous citizen,"¹¹ repeats Helvétius. Christianity is thus condemned by the *philosophe* before the tribunal of reason and human conscience. It stops all possible human progress, it is complicit in the most scandalous social abuses, and it makes self-hatred a norm: "[it] forbids man to love himself and orders him to hate pleasure and to cherish suffering."¹² Christianity is therefore perceived as a loss both from the point of view of reason and of historical evolution; the aim of existence, for many Enlightenment thinkers, was to restart the combat that was lost during the era of pagan antiquity in which reason was crushed, without being completely destroyed.

Progress as the Historical Engine of Social Rebalance

In his posthumously edited fragments from 1884, Nietzsche advances the idea that a great portion of Kantian philosophy, and even of the *Aufklärung* in general, is constructed in a semantic, discursive manner in which the serious investigation of the subject of concepts' reality is never allowed to emerge. The partisan of *Aufklärung* shows not the slightest hint of doubt in the power of discursive logic to fully contain or penetrate the real. For Nietzsche, scolding his excessively optimistic predecessors, language does

¹⁰ Helvétius, *De l'homme*, t. I, p. 402.

¹¹ Helvétius, *De l'homme*, t. II, p. 914.

¹² D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé*, pp. 186–187.

not reduce the contradictions of existence, but merely masks them in part with words that acquire their power due to a system of belief. Language thus has a persuasive power in itself, a magical aspect that manifests itself in certain concepts possessing a force that is beyond rationality, for they insert a principle of hope or unparalleled clarity. To name is not to resolve problems, and too often—particularly in abstract reasoning—the lexicological addition amounts to little more than semantics.

I am far from responding to such questions by imagining answers (i.e. words and nothing more!); at the right moment I think of old Kant, who one day posed himself the question, ‘how are synthetic a priori judgments possible?’ He answered, finally, with wondrous German depth: ‘through a capacity to do so.’—How is it that Opium makes us sleepy? That Doctor in Molière answers: it is due to its *vis soporifica*. There was also in this Kantian response of the ‘capacity’ some opium, or at least some *vis soporifica*: how many German ‘philosophers’ have fallen asleep on this!¹³

In the French world, ‘progress’ remains among the concepts forged to combat revelation—it is not only the most famous of such concepts, but that which possessed the most flexibility and elasticity, and that is closest to the *vis soporifica*. Without suggesting that it serves as a universal response, it closes off a number of inquiries and often serves as an *ad hoc* argument that, momentarily at least, serves to explain any given historical or social transformation. Progress is a force that assures the “indefinite perfectibility of the human race”;¹⁴ it possesses a great number of uses and succeeds in synthesizing an extraordinary quantity of ideas in one single utterance. To grasp its fundamental signification, we must begin by underscoring the point that progress serves as a counterweight to the old narrative of Genesis—that of damnation and divine punishment, according to which the woman, servant of the man, would bring forth children in sorrow and the man would be condemned to toil, “in the sweat of his face.” Original sin is opposed to what is understood as the progress of the human race. The foundational idea of Augustinian theology, sin, denies a possible amelioration of the condition of mortals, for human misery becomes a direct consequence of divine will. Sin also remains a totalizing explanation that supports a particular interpretation of the Bible as well as a certain understanding of the condition of mortals. Everything is explainable; the

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Œuvres philosophiques complètes XI, Fragments posthumes automne 1884–automne 1885* (Paris, 1982), 30 [10], p. 80.

¹⁴ Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris, 1970), p. 222.

greatest afflictions can be explained, from injustice to cataclysmic events, for they merely manifest the power of God, the authenticity of his word and of his will. Sin reinforces the veracity of the scriptures, and tends to solidify the institutions that speak in the name of these certitudes. This is why progress emerges at first as a polemical concept, a form of blasphemy in the eyes of the church, for it effects a fundamental rupture with the greatest assumption of the Christian tradition: the eternity of suffering placed in parallel with the principle of expiation. From this point on, a nation that progresses and improves the social conditions of its citizens becomes symptomatic, at least in the view of some philosophers, of an error in the reasons that had up to that point explained the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Even better, the concept of progress disproves a certain idea of God—it does not disprove divinity in general, but it does undermine the God spoken of in the gospels. If human beings have this capacity to improve their condition and diminish their suffering—that is to say, to *progress*—it becomes all the more legitimate to interpret Christianity not merely as an imposture, but as an erroneous doctrine. In this way, progress is to original sin what heliocentrism was to geocentrism, one derived from reason and knowledge, and the other from erroneous perception, one derived from the hypothesis that the world can be explained with mere human capacities, and the other relying on the idea that man must remain faithful to an ancient revelation, the truth of which remains inaccessible to questioning. It is thus not out of naivety that the term ‘progress’ is used in anti-Christian campaigns. If humanity is progressing, however so slowly, sooner or later Christianity will reveal its complete uselessness.

The signification of progress derives from a new way of comprehending history. Many Enlightenment thinkers read the evolution and transformation of civilizations through the paradigm of human perfectibility. This is a reading of temporality that gives to progress a particular heuristic value. History is decipherable—it has a precise sense, orientation and finality. There are certain criteria that must be respected if one is to grasp history adequately. To understand history, suggests Condorcet, one must grasp it in its totality, to look at it as if it is one single movement: otherwise stated, “neither to stop at the exceptions, nor at the details.”¹⁵ This principle varied little over the course of the century, and after Thermidor it would remain in place in the thought of many reactionaries. Understanding

¹⁵ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 13.

history requires a certain distance, though one never expresses clearly the exact nature of this distance. One must look at historical facts from above, watching them flow, avoiding a detailed analysis that would make one lose sight of the general movement. To this panoptic view must be added a separation between the periods and civilizations studied.

This schema of progress works best if one does not stray too far from the periphery of the West. From the hunter-gatherer to the Egyptian civilization, human beings do not cease to progress. Every technological addition transforms itself into a refutation of the book of Genesis and the necessity to expiate sin. For example, Condorcet, in his *Esquisse*, cautions the reader of possible reversals and setbacks of civilization during certain historical epochs. But progress is an indestructible force, even if pernicious doctrines can lead men astray into long moments of stagnation or even decadence. Progress is not a perfectly uniform forward movement; societies progress, stumble, learn from their errors, and start again to evolve, perfecting themselves anew. Nonetheless, to one who looks upon it with sufficient distance, the grand march of history remains roughly linear, and its general orientation clear. This vision of history appears so self-evident that no attempt is made to determine precisely the mechanisms that permit this perpetual adjustment whose function is to assure mankind his triumph over obstacles. Thus, after the dynasties of the pharaohs and the Persian wars, the civilisation of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Phidias pushes humanity more than ever before on the path of knowledge and technological, political and juridical perfection. "The Greek people," insisted Condorcet, "exercised such an extremely powerful influence on the progress of the human race [...] that they opened all the paths to truth."¹⁶ "Before the victory of Christianity", observed d'Holbach, there existed "flourishing nations and enlightened philosophers who constantly reminded men of their fundamental duties."¹⁷ Reason, of course, had not yet imposed itself as the sole criterion of knowledge and truth. Perpetual wars continued to obscure the landscape; people still prostrated themselves before idols; even worse, they offered sacrifices, libations and even sometimes nubile women or slaves. The arenas remained full of gladiators tearing themselves apart; part of the economy depended on the exploitation of others. The ancient world abounds in irrational practices and absurd speech on Hades, Olympus, divine apparitions, or

¹⁶ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 45.

¹⁷ D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé*, p. 139.

fairy-like creatures that inhabit the peripheries of the earth, the depths underground, and distant regions. In brief, ancient knowledge is real, but it remains limited and superficial on a number of important subjects. Ancient knowledge of geography, biology or physics, for instance, remains rudimentary to an eighteenth-century thinker. Nonetheless, for those who understand progress this ancient, pagan irrationality remains a lesser evil than that which will follow, for "a darker, more dangerous superstition that was a greater enemy to enlightenment, was soon to replace it."¹⁸ The connection between history, progress and Christianity is played out in precisely this moment when the Roman Empire is turned upside down, the moment when history takes another tangent leading man to take distance from the rudimentary reason that he had previously acquired.

The appearance of Christianity, its slow progression up until Constantine, and its gradual and irreversible incorporation into the institutions of the state, be it in Justinian's eastern empire or, after Odoacer, with Clovis in the West, produced changes in mores, laws and mentalities that became, in the eyes of many Enlightenment thinkers, a great hindrance to progress and a danger to human perfectibility. The concept of progress reverses the Augustinian equation according to which the destruction of Rome brings man closer to his creator, opening the path to a new covenant. Far from seeing the decline of Rome as a positive element in human evolution, one now sees it as an extraordinary catastrophe, a historic moment when reason was chased out of the world. The validation of suffering comes to appear like a most harmful obscurantism making the crucifixion into the prelude to the rise of ignorance, doctrinal fanaticism and a form of anti-intellectualism that is incarnated in the figure of the monks of the Thebaid, or in the figure of the bishops who organised the councils. Be it in Antioch, Nicea, Cesarea, Tyr, the councils multiplied under Constantine, a prince, observes Mably, "that contributed more than anything [...] to the ruin of the Roman Empire."¹⁹ Constantine's obstinate desire to establish dogmas became an obsession which continues to trouble and disconcert, more than a millennium later. The first emperor who knelt before the cross made his political principle out of his horror of subordinationism, to the point of neglecting the defence of his empire and the social condition of its citizens. This change in perspective and interest with regards to human reality inaugurates a transformation in

¹⁸ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 72.

¹⁹ Mably, *Observations sur les Romains*, p. 552.

mores and mentalities that is synonymous with decline and confusion. The struggle against Arianism and the putting into place of an official doctrine regulating the question of the trinity appear fundamental to the successors of Diocletian, given that the question of salvation trumps all other questions. The questions of dogma, postulates Mably, “were soon the only important ones; [from Constantine on], it was no longer important to repulse the enemies of the Empire, but to respond to an argument; no longer was it a question of preparing for war, but rather of erecting a formula for faith.”²⁰ The crucifixion is considered according to the progressivist paradigm, which winds up rejecting all the good effects of the Christian religion. There is an antinomy between the doctrines of Christ and the progress of the human race. This incompatibility is not merely the result of some quick conjecture derived from anticlerical sentiments held by some in the eighteenth century. It is inscribed in a history that allows one to deduce, with the use of reason, the fundamental truths necessary for the advancement of societies.

Seen from this rational (and anticlerical) perspective, the Christian religion becomes an error, its dogmas fallacious, and the history of its establishment is treated as a dangerous regress in social, economic and intellectual conditions. This attitude toward revealed religion became a veritable commonplace. On what does Christianity repose, asked d'Holbach? This is easily answered. “According to a justice that the human mind is incapable of understanding, a God, whose very essence renders him incapable of sin, finds himself bearing the iniquities of man and must expiate them in order to appease the fury of a father whom he has not offended. These are the inconceivable principles that serve as the foundation of Christian theology.”²¹ One can analyze all the dogmas and principles of this religion in this way without reason being able to make the slightest sense of this illogical system. The condemnation of Christianity, for the *philosophes*, becomes the moment when history and reason reconnect, making progress possible.

The question that Condorcet posed—which remained the one that is most concerned with the relationship between history, reason, progress and Christianity—is how, precisely, this shift occurred. Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat has the merit of having offered an original and more profound response to the delicate question of the causes and consequences of the fall of the Roman Empire. In his *Esquisse d'un tableau*

²⁰ Mably, *Observations sur les Romains*, p. 578.

²¹ D'Holbach, *Histoire critique de Jésus Christ*, p. 50.

historique des progrès de l'esprit humain, he suggests the following: the rise of Christianity in late antiquity *followed from* the disorganization and erosion of the structures of power, and not the reverse: "The weaker the Empire got, the more the Christian religion made rapid progress."²² Christianity is not responsible for the destruction of the empire and the decline of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*; rather, it was paganism's weakening and the slow degradation of social conditions that made possible the adherence to this type of religion. One must understand that the Christian religion is not a scourge whose very properties were so destructive as to be able to knock down a sound and rational spirit, throwing it before the cross. Christian principles and institutions could only take root in a pestilential soil where the mental condition of human beings was already weakened due to social and political causes. Marcus Aurelius, like Celsus, or Lucian, remained unmoved by the beliefs of the early Christians and could never have possibly considered, even for one instant, converting. It was fear, incomprehension in the face of continual troubles, the degradation of the elites, the disdain of knowledge, the stagnation of economic conditions, the resentment towards the powerful and the hatred of patricians who still dominated Rome that created the conditions in which Christianity became more attractive, more useful, and more apt to respond to the expectations of the citizens of an empire at once besieged from the outside and suffering from internal decline. Through the concept of progress, it becomes possible to judge the greatness of a historical period in which flowered Christianity (or any of the Abrahamic religions, if one follows the *Traité des trois imposteurs*). The degree of fervour shown towards Christianity becomes a kind of barometer indicating the mental health of a civilization, a criterion exhibiting the importance the era accords to knowledge, tolerance, justice and liberty.

It is thus not surprising that it was at the moment when the Empire was being most undermined that Christianity grew so rapidly. Knowledge was eclipsed,

In the states most subject to the spiritual domination of the Roman pontif, freedom of thought was proscribed with furor, action was repressed, science was punished, industry was crushed by the rapacity of the clergy, mores were neglected and replaced by practices; nations vegetated in numbness; men merely possessed the monastic virtues, painful for themselves and useless to society.²³

²² Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 83.

²³ D'Holbach, *Histoire critique de Jésus Christ*, p. 245.

D'Holbach once again argues that there is an antithetical relationship between Christianity and intellectual progress: as he saw it, reason was crushed; persecution began. The conditions that would later permit the torture of Calas were established, and the order of the day was to extinguish all independent human reason. "Scholars employed all their imagination," insists Condorcet, "to nourish beliefs in a few novel absurdities [...] and the priests forced princes to deliver to the flames any men who dared either to doubt any single one of these dogmas, to see through their imposture, or to express indignation at their crimes, or who strayed for a single moment from a blind obedience."²⁴ Thus, according to Enlightenment historiography, the Middle Ages become the period in which irrationality triumphed. Human misery feeds Christian belief, which has the consequence of increasing social problems and maintaining intellectual, technological and economic stagnation. From that point on, due to this vicious circle, the power of priests solidified, as did persecution, the celebration of suffering, and the denial of life. He who would seek to improve the conditions of life is anathema. That which is generally perceived to be symptomatic of this age (ignorance, intolerance, massacres) is not merely epiphenomenal, but is intrinsic to Christianity itself. The period of cathedrals is distinguished by the fact that "the Christians bathed in blood, like enraged tigers, for centuries."²⁵ Christianity has "caused more ravages and spilled more blood than all the superstitions of paganism."²⁶ The ultimate proof that progress is an inextinguishable force is that, in spite of all this, society succeeded, at the end of the fifteenth century, in reawakening and in detaching itself little by little from this harmful faith that would otherwise have damned civilization to eternal darkness.

Thus, the Renaissance (as the name indicates) is the historical moment when progress becomes once again the dominant force fashioning human activity. Another proof of the existence of progress as a motor of history is the sixteenth century, which prepares the way for the coming *philosophes*, renews the ties with the rationality of the ancients and breaks the discursive hegemony of the Church, which, for the first time in a millennium, loses its monopoly on spiritual and social matters. There are, no doubt, obstacles; abuses remain the rule, and Christian faith continues to mold minds: "The general picture," writes Condorcet, "still disgusts the

²⁴ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 98.

²⁵ Voltaire, *Traité sur la tolérance*, dans *Mélanges*, p. 625.

²⁶ D'Holbach, *Le christianisme dévoilé*, p. 147.

philosopher [...] but it no longer humiliates him.”²⁷ For those who can understand the logic of history, this questioning of Church principles and intellectual authority underlines the fact that humanity is indeed on the path towards perfection and enlightenment. Progress permits a number of concepts, ideas and narratives to hold together coherently. Seen in this manner, progress becomes an argument that is quite difficult to contest, for everything tends to prove its existence, even human misery, injustice or fanaticism. That is, one cannot disprove the existence of progress, for its absence is always portrayed as a mere regression due to some temporary irrational or anti-philosophical belief. Rarely defined in an exhaustive manner, progress is at first the counter-discourse of the church and the inverse of its dogmas and beliefs. It renders realistic the principle according to which the aberrations of the past are not the eternal condition of human beings. Progress renders plausible the ideas of happiness, of a future that is more tolerant, more socially just, freer and more rational. The thinkers of the renaissance become, from this point on, those with whom everything is once again possible. By decoding history, one can see humanity rising up and starting again to fight and to reason outside of the heavy dogmas of Christianity. Progress becomes a source of hope. This is why Pierre-André Taguieff suggests that progress is a “secularised religious illusion.”²⁸ It does not belong solely to the Enlightenment. From 1789 on, the reactionaries would place it at the centre of their analysis, demonstrating—to the point of absurdity, perhaps—the degree to which this concept has an enormous elastic potential and is inseparable from the discursive construction of modernity.

Reaction, or the Overturning of Progressive Historiography

The reactionary movement that was constructed parallel to the Enlightenment did not take place in isolation.²⁹ One of the most singular elements of the French reaction is that it developed without calling into question the analytical frame developed by the *philosophes*; rather it merely challenged the manner in which they had constructed their argument. The

²⁷ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, p. 134.

²⁸ Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'Effacement de l'avenir* (Paris, 2000), p. 322.

²⁹ On this point, see Didier Masseau, *Les ennemis des philosophes: l'antiphilosophie au temps des Lumières* (Paris, 2000); Gérard Gengembre, *La Contre-Révolution ou l'histoire désespérante* (Paris, 1989).

reaction did not deny the existence of progress, nor did it argue that history was inaccessible to us because of some cognitive deficiency, but rather it suggested that progress and history are inexplicable without the premises of the Christian religion and, *a fortiori*, Catholicism. The reactionaries developed their analysis within the conceptual structure established by the historiography of Voltaire, d'Holbach, Condorcet, etc. Pagan antiquity, the conversion of Constantine, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance all become nodal points around which is elaborated an interpretation of history according to principles that allow a progressive reading of human evolution. To understand the weight of this historiographical frame on the theses of the reactionaries, we must insist on the major transformation in their argumentation. It appears as if the *philosophes* produced such a change in perspective on the human condition that it became difficult to think in a frame that antedated this intellectual transformation. Maistre, Bonald, Lamennais, Buchez, Ozanam or Chateaubriand did not write in order to demonstrate that Christianity assures sinful souls of eternal salvation, but rather to explain why Christianity is the greatest ingredient of social justice. For the reactionaries, as for the *philosophes*, the perspective has reversed, and the social question takes precedence over human immortality. The conflict between the reaction and the *philosophes* does not take place in the sphere of theological quarrels because, following the *philosophes*, they no longer are preoccupied with these sorts of religious problems. It is no longer a question of reflecting on dogmas or the nature of grace, but of demonstrating the historical importance of Christianity with regards to human justice and the progress of civilizations. Does Christianity have a positive role or not in human history? The majority of the *philosophes* had responded in the negative to this question; it now appeared that the revolution has changed things, and that the terror has proven false the previous hypotheses. To this great puzzle, the reactionaries made the failures of 1789 into a central piece of evidence from which to reevaluate the role of Christianity and Enlightenment—a phenomenon that is now portrayed as more harmful than all the consequences of the Christian religion.

The modernity of the reactionaries, then, lies in their tendency to analyze Christianity according to temporal and political criteria. This manner of apprehending religion created the parameters of social conservatism that is characterized essentially by the fact that the principles of Christianity are now conceived as having a primary purpose of assuring social stability, which is to be opposed to the inevitable chaos of secularism. And this takes place without entering into any of the dusty theological

questions around the trinity or the eternity of souls or the nomenclature of venial sins.

At stake here is the analysis of the French Revolution and the elaboration of an alternate discourse and historiography. The deciphering of history and the concept of progress becomes the absolute guarantors of human truth, the only factors from which the evolution and finality of man can receive a just explanation. This change of view is important because it gives a first definition to the word 'reactionary'. He who would apply to politics the principles of Christianity in order to stabilize the social order participates in reaction. The question of a rigid organization occupies little by little all the discursive space to the point of overriding all the ancient theological questions that defined the Christian tradition. This fundamental transformation of religious argumentation is an illustration of what Michel Meyer calls the problematological conception of language: "Signification," he writes, "is a relation question/answer. To know the signification of a discourse comes down to being able to determine the discourse both in terms of question and answer. [...] Signification is an intrinsic characteristic of language; whatever we say or write, we are treating a question, which means that a discourse is always signifying."³⁰ The reactionaries respond to modern questions by rejecting the responses of the *philosophes* all the while sharing a large part of their phraseology and their conceptual structure. What's more, to these new argumentative modes they add concepts that belong to patristic theology, but transposed in a different manner. Thus, since the argumentative context and the questions have changed (to return to Meyer), the sense of the words is altered. 'Salvation,' for instance, remains important, but it is not political and social salvation that is meant. The questions change, to the point that there is truly a politicization of God and a sacralisation of history, man, and his social institutions. But the terms employed in the discussion remain polemical because of their multiple meanings. The level of complexity is due to the fact that, in response to a number of questions, identical terms and narratives are employed to construct different answers. On this explicative logic, the rationalization of beliefs does not merely lead to secularism or to disenchantment (the famous Weberian *Entzauberung*) but also to the Christianization of politics and of the discursive space from which one can respond to the Enlightenment. For a reactionary thinker, the political now dominates all inquiry; it finds its first explanation in the

³⁰ Michel Meyer, *Langage et littérature* (Paris, 1992), p. 211.

analysis of the meaning of history that will take up where canonic theology left off.

"To judge history correctly," suggests Joseph de Maistre in *Du pape*, "one must regard it from above and look only to the whole: the myopic ought not to read history; they will waste their time."³¹ Like Condorcet, Mably, Helvétius or Voltaire, one refers to history in order to construct arguments that will permit us to understand the present and to legitimate a certain type of prediction about the future. But in contrast to the *philosophes*, the *Encyclopédie* or the Calas affair are no longer the end points of the historical narrative. The reactionaries continue the story, portraying the Revolution as a disorder without precedent and the very incarnation of progress' opposite. In the hermeneutics of reaction, everything can be understood by its degree of conformity to Christianity, understood as the cement of social order. Just as those societies that follow Christian principles get better and better, those that distance themselves from such principles regress, experiencing chaos, war, poverty and misery. We must note, at the same time, that just as the supremacy of reason was, for many *philosophes*, incapable of ever fully disappearing because it was the necessary condition for human perfectibility, so too was Christianity immune from an irreversible destruction. Even in the darkest periods of revolt, God abides and never totally erases his presence from the movement of history. He even allows one to see his plans—at least if one is able to understand that historical evolution is the place in which divine will is manifested. "There is no chance in the world," repeats Joseph de Maistre endlessly, "and indeed, in a secondary sense, there is no disorder, in the sense that disorder is ordered by a sovereign hand that bends it to the rule and forces it to run towards the goal."³² Just as the middle ages prepared their own overturning, as incarnated in the Renaissance, Maistre "does not conceive of the revolution as a passing crisis, nor as the Apocalypse, but as the prelude to a religious revolution."³³ In both cases—be it with the inextirpable force of reason or of God's hand, progressivist historiography is a system constructed on the outside in *strictu sensu*: be it philosophical or reactionary, it is made for combating deniers. Certainly one may deny it, but it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to convince

³¹ Joseph de Maistre, *Du pape, Œuvres complètes*, t. II (Lyon, 1884), p. 211.

³² Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France, Œuvres complètes*, t. I (Lyon, 1884), p. 147.

³³ Jean-Yves Pranchère, *L'Autorité contre les Lumières. La philosophie de Joseph de Maistre* (Paris, 2004), p. 103.

someone of the absence of a historical finality if that person has, as his fundamental presupposition, the notion that the absence of rationality of a given epoch is the proof that reason will return triumphant in the future, or, in the opposite case, the one who suggests that the secularization of a given historical period is the incontestable proof that God is working to renew religious fervor.

Historiography in this era functions as a substitutive faith before which there can be no definitive retractions for those that bear its message. It is a form of paralogism that transforms into mere contingency any event that runs counter to its vision of the world, and at the same time seeks to sacralise that which it affirms. "This is because the Great Explanation," notes Marc Angenot, "explains (because it is supposed to explain) the succession of past events such that we must trust that it will show us the future—and it is because the future is foretold and its evolution inevitable that it projects its certitudes onto the present, that it permits us to 'see clearly' and to distinguish the good from the bad that are now confounded with the emergent and the condemned."³⁴ The question of whether it is defined by the *philosophes* or the reactionaries does not really change this old, fundamental principle of sinning by excess of coherence that makes "of the details an exception." History becomes the place in which a new type of faith is inscribed, a faith that transcends the frontiers separating the different political partisans. It is from this location that new differences are formed and perpetuated: the future political contests and the newly legitimated forms of knowledge and authority.

Thus, from the fury of Moses when he broke the tables to the death of Saint Augustine, which preceded Genseric's taking of Hippo, passing through, of course, the crucifixion and the writing of the gospels, humanity did nothing but progress day by day, perfecting itself. The triumph of Christianity over the acolytes of the Roman pantheon, like the condemnation of Louis XVI and the bloody events of the Terror become, in reactionary historiography, indisputable proof of the veracity of their beliefs and their arguments. Without the least bit of uncertainty, they claim that everything deriving from Christ—his words and actions, the juridical transformations, the power of the Church, the establishment of new mores and values—led to a real improvement in the social conditions of the Roman Empire. Man underwent a psychological metamorphosis; he

³⁴ Marc Angenot, *Dialogues de sourds. Traité de rhétorique antilogique* (Paris, 2008), p. 365.

developed a new manner of relating to the other, and a widening of morality. "Christianity," writes Philippe Buchez in his *Essai d'un traité complet de philosophie du point de vue du catholicisme et du progrès*, "changed human consciousness: we have today pities, repugnances, sympathies, scruples and even regrets that antiquity did not know."³⁵ Christianity strengthens human community; this religion breathes a new solidarity, fortifies justice, fights, with its works and precepts, to augment the sum of human happiness during this life. The Christian religion is the true source of the principle of social justice and of the idea that society is not condemned to repeat, *ad nauseam*, the infernal cycle of injustice, predation, the rule of force and the subjugation of the weak. The French Revolution modifies the trajectory of human progress in transforming the causes that assure the perfection of societies. The reactionaries do not question the idea that history can produce a response to the enigma of the meaning of life and predict the future of the human race; rather, they simply give a different reading to progressive history by substituting different variables. The analytical frame is similar, the equation is fundamentally the same, save that it finds itself reversed in certain places. Christianity is no longer incompatible with progress; it is rather the hatred of Christianity that is. "They said," explains Chateaubriand, "that Christianity was a religion born in heart of barbarism, absurd in its dogmas, ridiculous in its ceremonies, enemy of arts and letters, of reason and beauty, a religion that did nothing but shed blood, that forced men to retard the happiness and the enlightenment of the human race; we should thus seek to prove, on the contrary, that of all of the religions that have ever existed the Christian religion is the most poetic, the most humane, the most favourable to liberty, to the arts and to letters; that the modern world owes everything to it, from agriculture to the most abstract sciences; from the hospices for the indigent to the temples built by Michelangelo and decorated by Raphael."³⁶ The reactionaries establish the following principle: "Enlightenment equals revolution, revolution equals terror."³⁷ This new causality, which is not terribly subtle, remains the starting point for the construction of another reading of history in which Christianity is responsible for all the positive changes since the dawn of civilizations. Indeed, we must note that the validity of this

³⁵ Philippe Buchez, *Essai d'un traité complet de philosophie du point de vue du catholicisme et du progrès*, t. III (Paris, 1838–1840), pp. 557–558.

³⁶ Chateaubriand, *Le Génie du christianisme*, t. I (Paris, 1966), p. 57.

³⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *L'esprit des Lumières* (Paris, 2006), p. 25.

reasoning depends on the diffuse belief in historical determinism and in a possible deciphering of history. Suggesting that the decoding of temporality can lead to stable truths remained a manner of reflecting on the world that appeared self-evident in philosophical debates. From Thermidor up to the restoration, what does history show to those who study it? What role has Christianity played in the organization of societies, laws and human relations? In short, what is Christianity's social contribution? "[It] is the universal law, the eternal law of the human race,"³⁸ responds Ozanam immediately; it is "the power that civilized the modern world,"³⁹ adds Chateaubriand. Without Christianity, barbarism would be the norm; no human doctrine would temper the paradoxical human desire to dominate and exploit his neighbour. The Christian religion favours adherence to the values without which society would repose on force and oppression. As Gérard Gengembre explains, this religion "is [now] evaluated in terms of its social fecundity";⁴⁰ it is judged according to secular values that permit one to argue that it is more advantageous than mere reason for the organization and harmonization of social order; reason remains unable to assure, in the long term, the continuing perfection of human beings.

No doubt reason, with its capacity for synthesis and its procedural language, has a great capacity to improve material and technological conditions. Its role is incontestable in numerous innovations. But does altruism or human solidarity derive from reason, in its strictest limits? Does not history prove that the absence of Christianity always leads to exploitation, to the denial of humanity, to the mindless thirst for pleasure and riches? Has Christianity not succeeded, since its inception, at tempering mores, containing barbarism, and assuring respect for the indigent, the miserable, the neglected, those whom pagan antiquity had no remorse about excluding from the human race and condemning to slavery? "In the eras that we call barbaric, Christianity reinforced and tempered power, sanctified obedience, established correct social relations, purified mores, and often supplemented the laws," writes Félicien de Lamennais. "It covered Europe with admirable institutions that filled the always immense empty spaces in political institutions and attached to the state, by the sweet influence of a prodigious charity and good works, the innumerable class of

³⁸ Frédéric Ozanam, *Réflexions sur la doctrine de Saint-Simon*, in *Mélanges* (Paris, 1831), pp. 319–320.

³⁹ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, t. II (Paris, 1951), p. 340.

⁴⁰ Gérard Gengembre, *La contre-Révolution*, p. 128.

the indigent.”⁴¹ For the reactionaries, true progress is never material; independent of the technological prowess of an era, what distinguishes a society from another are the values that organise social relations. Christianity is great because it makes human equality an incontestable law and the first command of the creator. This laicization of the argument transforms this religion into a political doctrine whose function was to have altered the mores of the Roman empire, a civilization no doubt technologically admirable, but possessing inhuman values.

How, then, are we to define the Roman empire, its pagan religion, the gods of its pantheon, ancient philosophy, Greco-Roman mores, the customs, laws, and modes of life dominant before the apparition of Christianity? For the reactionaries, far from being a civilization superior to that which followed—that is, the middle ages so decried by the *philosophes*—the ancient world is first of all, insists Lamennais, “a horrid mixture of dissolution and barbarity, of impure rites and atrocious sacrifices.”⁴² Who are these free men, if not “barbaric proprietors of flocks of human beings”?⁴³ Social inequalities, from slavery, to war to the carnage that were elements of popular gratification reduce a great deal the enthusiasm that one can feel for the grandeur of this historical period. Just as the *philosophes* had insisted on the image of a middle ages that banished the liberty of thought, so did the reactionaries justify their view of the march of history by establishing as a norm the equation between paganism and the disregard for life. Nothing better represents the spectacle of social chaos, the depravation of mores, and the taste for murder and blood than the mores of the Romans. In is *Essai analytique sur les lois naturelles de l'ordre social*, Louis-Gabriel-Ambroise, vicomte de Bonald, is dumbfounded that one might believe the perfection of mores could take place in a pagan society. Their gods were as cruel as their men, exploitation was the norm, goodness a sign of weakness, and altruism a non-existent virtue. Truly, this is not the tableau of healthy mores nor the triumph of reason, but rather of “polygamy, religious prostitution, slavery, the games of the arena, sacrifices of human blood, cannibalism, idolatry, divining, and spells.”⁴⁴ To make Jupiter superior to Christ is equivalent to thinking that progress

⁴¹ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion. Œuvres complètes*, t. I, (Paris, 1836–1837), p. 5.

⁴² Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. III, p. 135.

⁴³ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. I, p. 290.

⁴⁴ Bonald, *Essai analytique sur les lois naturelles de l'ordre social, Œuvres complètes* (Paris/Genève, 1982), p. 94.

can be realized by the perpetuation of crime. For those who do not see it through distorted lens, pagan civilization is triply to be condemned: first, because it denies equality; second, because it controls no impulses; and third, because it represents gods as possessing the worst attributes of human beings. It transfers to the sphere of the gods the infamy of men. In a pagan civilization, the vices are not merely the social norm; they are equally the characteristics of the gods, who incarnate the values before which people bow and which they seek to emulate in daily life: "hatred, vengeance, sensual pleasure, pride, intemperance, avarice," writes Lamennais, "every crime has its own God and the temples depopulated hell."⁴⁵

In ignoring the irrevocable weight of original sin, the pagans promoted values that led them to a society where brutality was the norm and depravation a sort of social rule. The reactionaries are categorical, and offer no nuances on this point: pagan society is one that reduces citizens to the rank of animals, that makes bloody death into a festival and an entertainment for those few people who still believe themselves to be free: "men slit each other's throats in the public games to amuse their fellows,"⁴⁶ writes an exasperated Bonald. Gladiators, polygamy, pedophilia, homosexuality, "no vice surprises in the general corruption,"⁴⁷ for no obstacles oppose themselves to the natural inclinations that the reactionaries define as intrinsically deleterious for social organization. Thus, no progress can derive from pagan society, for human perfection is the natural corollary of an organization that limits the liberty of men, that fights against their first inclinations, that opposes itself to what they instinctively think and desire. In other words, progress can only exist in a society that considers the amelioration of social conditions as the consequence of a pitched battle against the first penchants of human beings.

In this perspective, the rise of Christianity bears another signification. Far from harming social conditions, it purified Roman mores and produced a transformation of values that resulted in the fact that "all thoughts, all desires, all efforts are directed towards the perfection and the happiness of man."⁴⁸ "Everywhere where Christianity is introduced," writes Lamennais, "it produces the same effects, and as soon as it leaves

⁴⁵ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. III, p. 133.

⁴⁶ Bonald, *Du divorce considéré au XIX^e siècle*, *Œuvres complètes*, t. V (Paris/Genève, 1982), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Bonald, *Du divorce considéré au XIX^e siècle*, p. 373.

⁴⁸ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. IV, p. 376.

barbarity replaces it.”⁴⁹ The differences between the manner in which the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and the reactionaries apprehended the movement of history demonstrates clearly that it does not suffice merely to establish that history is decipherable for the rest of one’s analysis to follow on its own. For the reactionaries, the influence of Christianity remains essential for maintaining social order. Without it, society would return to the worst practices, perceived as both the manifestation and the symptoms of original sin. This adherence to new analytical parameters overturns the manner in which one is to understand the role of Jesus Christ, the conversion of Constantine, and the middle ages in the history of the progress of civilizations. From the figure of the charlatan, the impostor, the illiterate Judean, the obtuse fanatic who taught people to suppress the use of reason, Jesus Christ becomes “the great representative on earth of equality, liberty, and the republic.”⁵⁰ Given the pity that he taught and raised up to supreme value, he incarnates the opposite of Roman principles. He is the anti-Pagan *par excellence*. The deference that he demonstrates towards the weakest is what particularly holds the attention of Chateaubriand, who perceives in the arrival of Christ “a great, happy event to counter-balance the deluge of barbarians and the general corruption of mores.”⁵¹ Christ humanises men; he enlightens them on the social foundations of a harmonious existence.

The fall of Rome symbolizes, from this point on, the historical moment that ensures that society will be reconstructed on a more just and egalitarian basis, a manner more favourable to all. In opposition to the story told by the *philosophes*, and miles away from that recounted by Condorcet, the reactionaries portray the reign of Constantine as positive and progressive. Far from saying that the Emperor wasted his time fashioning new dogmas, these writers now explain why the first Christian emperor was and remains one of the great reformers in a long Christian tradition in which the amelioration of the social order is the highest priority. Constantine passed his life in seeking the public good, in giving dignity to the excluded, in tempering the practice of war, in worrying about the fate of slaves and the downtrodden. It is to him that we should credit this disappearance of slavery, the end of gladiators, public prostitution, bloody sacrifice, and the Roman pantheon. It is also to his time that we can attribute the according

⁴⁹ Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. I, p. 359.

⁵⁰ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, t. II, p. 312.

⁵¹ Chateaubriand, *Le génie du christianisme*, t. II, p. 256.

of a greater dignity to women and the sacralisation of marriage, a union that ultimately became the core of social organization, the maintenance of public order, and the protection of children. "The laws of the religion," underscores Lamennais, "becoming more and more the laws of the state, the mores were purified: one had a higher idea of the sanctity of marriage, the life of the child and its innocence were protected, slavery, at first softened, finally disappeared entirely, a new law of war was established, governments were strengthened, princes were able to let their brothers live, they no longer feared the revolutions that were so frequent among the ancients."⁵²

Christianity consolidates societies and prevents human chaos; it is the ultimate break on all revolutionary intents, on revolt, on all attempts to destabilize society. This explains the reactionaries' admiration for the middle ages. Interpreted as a historical period during which society progressed as values Christianized, medieval society remained that which distinguished itself most from pagan society; its mode of life and mentality made of this period an unparalleled social ideal. Note that the analyses of the reactionaries are replete with the same type of phantasms and discursive divagations as those from the era of Enlightenment, with the exception being that it was no longer the task to erect a model of social organization based on pagan obedience, but a moment in the past that realized the outlines of Christian principles of political organization so as to produce a unitary and harmonious whole. In the one case as in the other, the delicate question is never posed: how is this pure accord between a social order and a system of beliefs achieved? The analysis of the movement of history has difficulty functioning in anything other than monolithic blocs. It is incapable of thinking coexistence of numerous mentalities in the same temporal space or conflicts, tensions between non-convergent points of view, unless it is variable degrees of adherence to a number of beliefs that do not necessarily form a homogenous whole. Condorcet, for example, reduced the movement of history into three segments: pagan progress, Christian regression, and, finally, the return to progress due to philosophy's reconquest. The reactionaries followed a similar schema, but changed the sequences. The unequivocal condemnation of pagan antiquity can also be read as a subtle critique of the evolution of Europe since the renaissance and, *a fortiori*, as an attack on the philosophical discourse of the 18th century.

⁵² Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, t. IV, pp. 373–374.

Thus, the deciphering of history does not place priority on historical knowledge as such; it serves rather to produce arguments that support or oppose eighteenth-century discourses concerning the utility of the Christian religion for social progress. Just as the commonplace Enlightenment narrative about the intellectual regression of man from Constantine through to the middle ages was in the service of a greater combat against the power of the Church before the French Revolution, so too did the narrative of the reactionaries exist to provide arguments against that which was perceived as responsible for the Revolution and the terror, that is, the dechristianization of beliefs and the primacy of reason over any other axiological verticality. Thus, ever since the Middle Ages were eclipsed by the Renaissance, argues Bonald, "then, if I may say so, all became night in society; it was then that there appeared the darkest systems of God, man, power and duties: all intelligence was obscured."⁵³ The Renaissance was a period of darkness that inaugurated a social regression that culminated in the execution of the king, the abuses of the *Comité de Salut Public* and the reign of the guillotine as the central point of the organization of a society that sought to repress, bloodily, the smallest trace of Christian institutions. The new narrative suggests that the end of the Middle Ages marks the beginning of a long period of decline which is characterized by an attempt to impose paganism in every sphere of social organization. It is a return to Greco-Roman barbarity, and not an advance towards any form of human progress. "The symptoms of death," confirms Joseph de Maistre, "reappeared at the end of the XVth century, which was called the century of the Renaissance: it is then that human reason, reasserting its ancient pride that one would have thought had been forever cast down by faith, dared once again to scrutinize and attack traditions."⁵⁴ For the reactionaries, history demonstrates that a society cannot progress without the aid of Christianity. This religion offers rules without which man reverts to a bestial condition; he rediscovers the desire for murder and blood, he loses all respect for authority, and little by little he develops the taste for the idea of overturning all public order to satisfy his own natural propensities. Once this mechanism has been put in place, the return to barbarism is merely a question of time, for history does not lie. It is thus not without reason that the reactionaries declared the century of Voltaire,

⁵³ Bonald, *Du divorce considéré au XIX^e siècle*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, ou Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la providence; suivis d'un traité sur les sacrifices*, t. I, (Genève, 1993), p. 27.

of the *libertins*, of the *Encyclopédie* and of the revolutionaries, "the most shameful age of the human race."⁵⁵

The Value and the Limit of Historiography

The annexation of one part of the Enlightenment's and the reaction's argumentation on the construction of historiography responds principally to the search for fixed points of reference in a modern world that is judged, *a priori*, to be derelict, and where both traditional authorities and their ancient certainties appear more and more unable to furnish us with acceptable explanations that can be defended absolutely. With research into natural right and the state of nature, historiographical analysis remains the manner in which *disenchanted* modernity has sought to escape from the narrow sphere of mere opinion. History with a capital H would, from this point on, furnish responses and solid arguments for many social, political, and moral problems, or at least for all the problems that do not pertain directly to the theological sphere. History is said to contain hidden truths accessible to those who make use of their reason, who have recourse to study and analysis; it has the characteristic of directly confronting those who observe it, who question it, who observe it in the silence of their study. The meaning of history is accessible. Erecting it as a supreme authority would be the great consequence of the Cartesian revolution that proscribes the role of transcendence in the discovery of terrestrial truths, a paradoxical consequence, perhaps, given Descartes' own lack of enthusiasm for history as a guide to truth. History transforms itself into the possessor of the highest truth that human beings can aspire to attain by means of their own understanding. This assertion appears to be the rule, and it is on this ground that numerous *philosophes* and reactionaries dispute over the manner in which history is to be decoded. There remains—and this point is fundamental—that, like the discourse of natural right or the state of nature, the new concepts that modernity forged in order to accede to non-transcendent certainties do not succeed, as Simone Goyard-Fabre underlines, in achieving a complete autonomy in the face of the divine realm. The conceptual rupture that produced a Condorcet, a Helvétius or a d'Holbach only appears to be real. Nothing is less rational, in the end, than the reading of progress across the centuries, or

⁵⁵ Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, t. I, p. 291.

the deciphering of the movement of history, or the view that social conditions in the state of nature and the description of natural laws, things that remain the other grand intellectual projects of the age. "Strictly speaking, the radical de-theologicalization of natural law," writes Goyard-Fabre, "was not possible: simply put, the theological character of the concept was simply expressed in a manner different than that of divine transcendence. Between the human and the divine, between the profane and the sacred, there was, in reality, neither separation nor antinomy."⁵⁶ A similar point could be made about the attempt to explain the movement of history and the multiple causes that influence its advances and regressions. In the conceptual universe of the eighteenth century, progress took the place of salvation and the march of history replaced providence such that far from embodying a novel method of reflecting on the world, these concepts resulted in the secularization of axioms fundamental to the Judeo-Christian tradition: Eden, the causality of evil, hope, regeneration, palingenesis, etc. (although the semantic window-dressing was applied with more or less success here). "The idea of progress," argues Pierre-André Taguieff, "serves to calm, to give confidence, and to permit one to live with hope in spite of all the reasons to despair [...] Faith in progress connects; it establishes a community of believers whose existence tends towards a good that is supremely shareable, not for contemporary human beings, but for humans in the future."⁵⁷ Taguieff explains that if progress as an analytical concept has resonated for more than two centuries it is because it "secures something very much like spiritual comfort."⁵⁸ Both the historiography of the Enlightenment and the reaction comfort those who read it and adhere to it. Historiography orients one in time, gives a meaning to duration, and explains the unfolding of history by means of accessible and comprehensible causes. It gives an account of evolution in its totality by turning its back on history's impenetrable complexity. Thus, whether one adopts the philosophical or reactionary model, the description of the movement of history has its prime value in its capacity to situate man temporally and to give a sense and direction to historical upheavals, showing human history to be not stagnant, dispiriting, chaotic

⁵⁶ Simone Goyard-Fabre, *Les embarras philosophiques du droit naturel* (Paris, 2002), p. 352.

⁵⁷ Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'effacement de l'avenir*, p. 342.

⁵⁸ Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'effacement de l'avenir*, p. 343.

or otherwise incomprehensible, but rather tending towards a precise end which is its perfection.

The concept of progress, while often associated with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, has many other uses and acceptations whose sense is not reducible simply to the single context of the *Encyclopédie*. The *philosophes* were not the only ones to hold a narrative of progress; the reactionaries also had their version, though it took on a different garb. There are also the narratives of progress in political struggles, the narratives of social, technological, economic, scientific or ecological progress. There appears to be progress anytime that one can give a linear reading of a phenomenon in which evolution follows an ascending slope. Both progress and its opposite—the descending slope that is usually represented in apocalyptic stories of decadence—remain the most simplistic manner of infusing sense into temporality. This reading can be rendered more complex—the addition of a cycle, or a return, of a slump, a leap, or a new stage can sometimes nuance the tableau—but without this linear understanding (either ascending or descending), history becomes a “désordre dynamique”⁵⁹ about which it becomes very difficult to give any global meaning or direction that inspires hope or despair, to indicate the urgency of a given situation, or to call for patience at a reversal. In his *Dialogues de sourds, traité de rhétorique antilogique*, Marc Angenot suggests reconsidering the manner in which the history of ideas is done in order to underscore the role of the unknowable in the production of meaning and the creation of grand argumentative schemas intending to grasp the world in its totality.

The great intellectual history to be written would be the history of the many ways, ancient and modern, to exceed the knowable. Everything that is expressible, everything that is susceptible to argument is not in the order of the knowable *ipso facto*—it is the triumph of science to be a device that, in contrast to old metaphysics, says: this is a correct statement, this has the appearance of a questioning, of an argument, but merely the appearance because this refers to *nothing*.⁶⁰

Both the narratives about providence and those about the march of history derive from this excess of the understandable. Discourse on these points is, at base, nothing more or less than placing the imaginative faculties of

⁵⁹ Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'effacement de l'avenir*, p. 226.

⁶⁰ Marc Angenot, *Dialogues de sourds*, p. 435.

human beings in the service of political, religious or philosophical causes. If, finally, there is knowledge behind these historiographical creations, this knowledge refers particularly to past hopes that human beings might determine the causes of their misfortune, and live in a universe of fixed points of reference, with certitude about the march of history and the advent of a future happiness for the majority of citizens—something that could be treated as more than mere fiction.

(Translated from the French by Robert Sparling)

12. THE DIVINITY OF HUMAN MAKING AND DOING IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Sandra Rudnick Luft

"In a certain way", Jurgen Habermas asserts, "the philosophy of history begins early in the 18th century with Vico's famous explication of the *topos verum et factum convertunter*." In that explication Vico says, "This science (the philosophy of history) proceeds exactly as does geometry, which creates the world of magnitudes . . . but does so with so much greater reality, as the laws of human affairs have more reality than those of points, lines, surfaces, and figures. And this, O reader, must provide you with a divine pleasure, for in God to know and to do are the same thing."¹ Habermas is claiming not only that modern philosophy of history begins when human making in the world is united with human knowing, but also that that unity of knowledge and action secularizes a conception of agency previously attributed only to God, the theological view that historical events are the result of neither chance nor fate but rather are provident; that is, they are purposeful and governed by mind.

Habermas is only one of many 20th-century writers who have claimed that Enlightenment philosophy of history—and in particular, the theory considered its most significant achievement, that of the infinite progress of the human race—was the secularization of theological views.² Similarly, his characterization of the nature of divine agency as the convergence of

¹ Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston, 1973), pp. 242–43. The quotation from Vico's *New Science* is 349 (all references to the *New Science* are to paragraph numbers). Though Habermas gives as reference the Bergin and Fisch translation, his version differs from it, and where he translates "*il conoscere e 'l fare*" as "to know and to do," the English version reads "to know and to make." Since for God doing and making are as inseparable as both are from knowing and since my interpretation of the *New Science* stresses the activity of making in its most material sense, I shall use the word *make* rather than *do* in referring to this passage.

² The literature of works on the secularization thesis is extensive. I mention only the ones I have found most useful: Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, 1932); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920); Charles Frankel, *The Faith of Reason: The Idea of Progress in the French Enlightenment* (New York, 1948); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, 1986); Frank Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris*, (New York, 1962); Henry Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment*

knowing and making is a common one. Though Vico is usually credited with the most explicit formulation of the *verum/factum* principle, many commentators have noted the pervasiveness of the equation of knowing and making in modern writers as diverse as Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, Boyle, Gassendi, Mersenne, Descartes, and Hobbes. Of even greater significance, Habermas assumes—as, indeed, do all who have identified the age's new conception of human agency with *verum/factum*—that the principle is an epistemological one, heralding the view that henceforth the criterion of knowledge is the control it gives humans over the natural or historical worlds.

There is no question that the identity of knowing and making had been a predicate previously attributed only to God and that when the age appropriated it, it did so on behalf of its belief that humans were now able to control their own historical process, a process that was not only secular but also progressive—the infinite perfectibility of the human race. The seeds of that optimistic view can already be found in such Renaissance Neoplatonic writers as Pico della Mirandola, even to the characterization of human agency as “divine.” For Pico, man had been given an indeterminate nature and placed intermediately between the unchanging and the flux of time so that through his own actions and knowledge, the saying “You are all gods and sons of the most high” might become true.³ But that the medieval or Renaissance conceptions of the nature of the unity of God's knowing and making were *theological* notions, and that, as such, had been “secularized” in the modern conception of history, is another issue entirely, a theoretically fraught issue that has not been recognized as such.

This discussion as to whether the theory of progress is a secular or a secularized “theological” notion of history focuses on the conception of divine agency that the theory attributes to humans rather than on allusions to Providence. This issue is key to distinguishing between two radically different conceptions of God in the West, and the failure to appreciate the significance of that distinction makes the use of the term *theological* misleading. The theological tradition is, in effect, the product of a syncretic process that placed the biblical image of an omnipotent Creator-God in the context of assumptions grounding Greek metaphysics, a syncretism

(Cambridge, Mass., 1958). Also, see the excellent “Bibliographical Essay” in David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 425–53.

³ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (South Bend, Ind., 1956), p. 12.

that produced what should be called an “onto-theological” tradition. The incompatibility of the sources of that onto-theology is nowhere more apparent than in its conception of divine agency.

Strictly speaking, the biblical tradition is not a theological one since the Hebraic narrative did not rest on philosophical grounds that allowed for a systematic, rational ontology of the divine nature. Regardless, the paradigm of the theological conception of the unity of divine action is the radically creative act in Genesis that brought into existence *ex nihilo* a wholly artifactual world. The biblical narrative does not distinguish between God’s knowing or his acting, nor condition the latter by the former. The creative act in Genesis is wholly ontological, creating, indeed, the contingent object of knowledge. The distinction between God’s “knowing” and his “actions” (a logical, not chronological, one) arises only in the context of philosophic concerns. The notion of activity as governed by prior knowledge or purpose derived from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic assumptions. When a Hellenized Christianity resolved the question of priority by conditioning God’s actions with knowledge and subjective intent, it turned those actions into a mimetic re-making rather than an unconditioned creative act. That onto-theological version, dominant in the West since the Middle Ages, I consider secular rather than theological since based on philosophical assumptions. It is only within onto-theological assumptions that the unity of *verum* and *factum* in God can be considered an *epistemological* principle. The Enlightenment vision of an infinitely progressive historical process, insofar as it depends on and is assured by the belief that human making is determined by knowledge, is a conception of causal agency possible only within onto-theological assumptions.

A radically originary ontological conception of the unity of knowing and making can be found in the 18th century, but only in the *New Science* of Giambattista Vico.⁴ What concerns me in this essay is the problem raised by the claim that the theory of progress secularizes a conception of providential agency for an understanding not only of Enlightenment philosophy of history but for all views of human agency influenced by it. That problem is underscored in the use Habermas makes of it. He goes

⁴ I have made this argument at length in my book, *Vico’s Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science between Modern and Postmodern* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003). While the scope of the present article does not allow for a discussion of Nietzsche, in the book I argue not for a historical relationship but rather for the affinities in the views of language in Vico, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. I distinguish what I consider a conception of human language and agency as ontologically creative from the mimetic making privileged in the philosophic tradition.

on to argue that Vico himself failed to recognize and draw out the secular implications of *verum/factum*, implications fully realized only by Marx. Whereas theology had made God, as an “*intellectus originarius* [who] creates the world by thinking it”, the subject of history, Vico claims only that man would “‘comprehend his spirit as the product of history.’” Vico’s claim cannot realize the *telos* “of a critical philosophy of history . . . The analogy between God and man cannot hold” because for Vico man is neither omnipotent nor provident. “For him ‘men make their history, yet . . . not . . . with will and consciousness.’” The retrospective nature of Vico’s epistemology means that man cannot construe future states “‘according to laws of progress’ . . . [T]he prospective stance so important to critical thought . . . escapes him.” History, for Vico, is never other than a “cyclic recurrence of periods of progression and regression . . . The development of philosophy of history” culminates only in Marx’s identification of labor as the material form that moves history, an “active appropriation . . . [by] revolutionary praxis that is only initiated and guided by theory”, an accomplishment “reconcil[ing] Vico, who is preserved [sublated] in Hegel, with Kant.” Only with Marx does man become the subject of history.⁵

Like Habermas, all who discuss the modernist version of *verum/factum* interpret the principle as epistemological, and most understand the knowledge it yields in the modernist sense, as constructive, pragmatic, a way of knowing that can be applied technologically in human practice. Paulo Rossi dates the emergence of that “new conception” of knowing and making with Bacon and Galileo. Despite their very different views of knowledge—Bacon’s emphasis on the observation of nature by means of an experimental method and Galileo’s adoption of a mathematical method—both understand knowledge as wholly operational, and both versions gave its adherents the belief “that the artificial does not differ from the natural in forme or essence, but only in the efficient”, a challenge to the Aristotelian conception that art—the artifacts of human making—is nothing other than the imitation or completion of nature.⁶ It is certainly the case that the operational conception of making challenges the Aristotelian distinction between nature and art. So too, however, does the biblical model, and it does so in a very different sense than the

⁵ Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, pp. 243–50.

⁶ Paolo Rossi, *Philosophy, Technology, and the Arts in the Early Modern Era*, trans. Salvator Artarnasio (New York, 1970), pp. 37–45.

modern. It is, indeed, that very different sense that illuminates the extent to which the modern version retains an essential relationship with the onto-theological—and secular—tradition.

The Aristotelian distinction between nature and art presupposed the privileged role the Greeks gave to the activity of contemplation, the object of which was an eternal formal order. Contemplation was “divine” in the sense that it was possible only “in so far as something divine [reason] is present in [man].” For Aristotle, formal order was inherent in the natural world, and he, like Plato, understood art as the imitation of that order. Aristotle added to the activity of the rational soul the doing (*praxis*) of a practical and the fabrication (*poiēsis*) of a productive intellect.⁷

It was Plato, however, not Aristotle, who created the paradigmatic image of that mimetic activity in the Divine Architect of the *Timaeus*.⁸ Though Plato called the Artificer “creator”, the productivity of that craftsman was not ontologically originary since it merely reproduced an a priori formal order. Yet even if philosophy had given ontological significance to the role of the Timaeian Artificer in the production of material images of rational forms, its conception of productive process would have differed radically from the ontologically originary act of Genesis, which was unconditioned by intelligible purpose. The God of the biblical narrative was not a rational agent but rather a creative force. The productive power that enabled him to create *ex nihilo* was a function not of rational intent but of language. There was no distinction in Genesis between nature and art because, for the Hebrews, *nature ITSELF was wholly artifactual*. And just as God’s creative act did not follow from his knowing, so too the artifact produced by his creativity was not an intelligible object of knowledge.

The syncretic process bringing together these radically incompatible conceptions of “divine” agency began with Philo Judaeus. In his effort to make the biblical emphasis on absolute beginnings compatible with Platonism, Philo formulated a *principio gnoseologico*, the claim that the maker of a thing can know it.⁹ In making the creative act intelligible, if

⁷ Aristotle, “Ethica Nicomachea,” *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941) 10.7.1177b, pp. 1104–05; *ibid.*, “Ethica Nicomachea,” 6.3. 1140a–1140b, pp. 1025–26; *ibid.*, “Physica,” 2.8.199a–199b, pp. 249–51.

⁸ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, 1949), 28a.

⁹ For the Philo works relevant to my discussion, see Philo, “On the Account of the World’s Creation Given by Moses,” *Philo*, 1, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1929); *ibid.*, “On the Cherubim,” 2 (Cambridge, Mass., 1929); *ibid.*, “On the Migration of Abraham,” 4 (Cambridge, Mass., 1932). For my discussion of Philo, I have also drawn on Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious*

only to the Creator, Philo began the process that transformed the Creator-God into a Divine Architect—Habermas's "*intellectus originarius*"—and a scriptural religion into onto-theology. Of equal importance was the use he made of the Stoic notion of Providence. The Stoics had assumed a divine force immanent in nature, a Logos, principle of reason, or natural law. Such an immanent "providential" principle was deterministic, raising for the first time the issue of free will. Philo believed the biblical conception of a transcendent deity was compatible with the Stoic notion of a principle of "divine" guidance immanent in the rational structure of nature and the human soul.¹⁰ What has been characterized by scholars of the Enlightenment as the secularization of Providence was, in effect, the secularization of the philosophic conception of rational "providential" guidance—the view I am distinguishing from the biblical.

If the modern conception of human action assumed, with Pico, that humans had not only a rational knowledge of nature but also the freedom to realize their rational goals—that, in short, man had become a God to man—the moderns were able to realize their desire for a constructive form of knowing in a way inconceivable to Renaissance Neoplatonists.¹¹ What constituted the radical difference between the hermetic use of mathematics and the moderns' ability to apply mathematics so constructively to nature was the insight that the key to constructive application was method. When the nature and significance of the scientific method were finally grasped, this understanding was so, however, on behalf of two very different senses of the nature of method, one assumed by Galileo, the other by Bacon. Both men, moreover, claimed their methods were modeled on the unity of knowing and making that had previously belonged only to God.

Both Galileo and Bacon claimed that the world God created is a book, one that can be read if one knows the language in which it is written. Without a knowledge of that language, Galileo insists, "one wanders in vain through a dark labyrinth."¹² Galileo has no doubt that the language

Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 289–94 and 325–32; and *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), vol. 1, chaps. 13, 14, and 15.

¹⁰ This interpretation of the relationship between Philo's conception of Providence and the Stoic conception is developed at length in Peter Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexander*, *Text and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 77 (Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp. 1–18.

¹¹ Pico, *Oration*, pp. 51–56.

¹² Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, quoted in Edwin Arthur Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New Jersey, 1992), p. 75.

God used was mathematics, a version of the Neoplatonic assumption that the “creative” process is mimetic of a prior formal pattern. Though Bacon is generally considered the first to articulate the modern claim that with the power yielded by human knowing of the natural world, humans can insure the progress of their historical world, it was, ultimately, Galileo’s methodological assumptions that provided the foundation for the late-18th-century theory of progress. In the wake of the successes of the new science, the mathematical method dominated the age’s conception of the generative nature of human knowing. It determined, as well, the metaphors used to describe the world God had made. In using the language of mathematics, God, moderns such as Descartes, Boyle, Leibniz, La Mettrie, and Hobbes claimed, had produced a world that was a machine. The “image of God as artificer, engineer, clockmaker”, Rossi says, flows from “[t]he criterion of knowledge as *making*.” Moreover, that “image” “applies to man as much as it does to God. The human intellect . . . can have access only to those truths which have been structured by men: the truth of physics, of geometry, and of mathematics.”¹³ Similarly, Amos Funkenstein argues that the modern conception of human activity derived from the secularization of divine predicates: “Never before or after were science, philosophy, and theology seen as almost one and the same occupation”, he asserts, calling that occupation a “secular theology”.¹⁴

Though Bacon believed that the world created by God was legible, he did not believe that it had been created in the language of mathematics. His artificer was not an “engineer, a clockmaker”, nor was the created world a machine. For Bacon, God was not a rational being but rather the omnipotent God of Genesis, the God of his Calvinist tradition, whose creative activity presupposed the primacy of the Divine Will over his Reason. The real world created by an arbitrary will was wholly material, and, since material objects eluded “determination by form”, its order was contingent: “[S]uch a note of difference it pleased God to put upon the

¹³ Rossi, *Philosophy, Technology, and the Arts*, pp. 143–44.

¹⁴ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 178–79. Funkenstein includes as laymen of that “secular theology” Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, Newton, Hobbes, and Vico. For Funkenstein, medieval controversies concerning the predicates of God converged in a new ideal, that of scientific knowledge as *ergetic* or pragmatic. With that belief Galileo and Descartes adopted a new method of knowing common to mathematics and mechanics, the “reconstruction of reality” through experiment: “only the doable—at least in principle—is also understandable: *verum et factum convertuntur*.”

works of Power, and the works of Wisdom, the one carrying the style of a Manufacture, and the other of a Law, Decree, or Counsel".¹⁵

A material, contingent world made by an arbitrary God—with his hands, in the “style of a manufacture”—is “to the eye of the human understanding . . . a labyrinth.”¹⁶ But even if Bacon’s God is not governed by the knowledge of forms, he is, as Bacon says, “truly, the Giver and Architect of Forms.”¹⁷ The order of a labyrinth is not inherent to it but rather imposed on it, and Bacon is certain that it can be read by the right method. To a trained observer, the world reveals “the footsteps of the creator imprinted in his creatures.”¹⁸ It is only the empirical study of the natural world that enables humans to trace those footsteps. With that knowledge, “the mind may exercise over the nature of things the authority which primarily belongs to it.”¹⁹ The results of that “authority” are “a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity.”²⁰ Sure in his belief in the unity of knowing and making evidenced by the progress of the mechanical arts, Bacon in *New Atlantis* paints a vivid picture of the works they bring forth.²¹

Though, like his contemporaries, Bacon desires a generative form of knowing, like his contemporaries he too insists, against Aristotle, that there is no essential difference, “but only in the efficient [cause]”, between natural processes and human artifice, he has too great a sense of God’s unconditioned creative power to attribute it to humans. The analogy Bacon makes between man and God exemplifies the radical difference between divine *poiēsis* and human *techne*. Men are like God, not in their nature but in their activism: they are not instructed to create but to hold dominion over God’s world. Their making is as mimetic as it is for those who believe the world is inherently rational: it presupposes knowledge of an order humans did not create.²² In an often quoted passage, Bacon insists “man is but the servant and interpreter of nature: what he does

¹⁵ Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, The First Book, sec. 5, ed. G.W. Kilchen (London, 1962), pp. 31–36.

¹⁶ Francis Bacon, “The Great Instauration,” in *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, ed. Jerry Weinberger (Illinois, 1989), pp. 13 and 32.

¹⁷ Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, bk. 2, sec. 15, ed. Fulton H. Anderson (Indianapolis, 1960), p. 151.

¹⁸ Bacon, “The Great Instauration,” p. 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²¹ Bacon, “New Atlantis,” in *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, pp. 71–80.

²² “For all learning is knowledge acquired, and all knowledge in God is original,” Bacon, *Advancement*, The First Book, sec. 6, p. 36.

and what he knows [are] only what he has observed of nature's order . . . [N]ature cannot be commanded except by being obeyed."²³

Despite the fact that Bacon's vision of the social effects of human power was so prescient—the earliest, and clearest, formulation of the theory of progress that emerged full-blown at the end of the 18th century—it was neither Bacon's conception of method nor his conception of the “divine unity” of knowing and making that fed the imagination of the progress theorists. They had a far more expansive conception of human agency than Bacon's and grounded it on the methodological foundation he had rejected. Whereas Bacon conceived of constructive activity as the manipulation of natural processes for human purposes, a “remaking” of nature consequential in the social world, the 18th-century theorists were caught by the idea that the methodology of the new sciences could be readily applied to social and historical processes *themselves*. The key to a progressive future was the reform of social institutions—legal, political, economic, and educational—as well as of morality, manners and the arts, in accordance with an always increasing level of knowledge of the way the social and historical world actually worked.²⁴

As the moderns turned more directly to doing and making in the historical social world, their understanding of human praxis, now conditioned by their conception of scientific method, became more technological. Whereas Bacon had turned away from the “metaphysical” faith in mathematics and had embraced an empirical method, progressivists were captivated by the successes of the mathematical method and its potential application to the social world. Certainly, the moderns were influenced by the empirical method, further strengthened by Locke's sensationalist theory of knowledge, but I believe the significance of empiricism for the theory of progress has been overemphasized. Frank Manuel's astute observation of Turgot can be applied to the progress theorists in general. Turgot's philosophy of history, he acknowledges, is firmly rooted in the current sensationalist theory of knowledge. Sheer accumulation of experience in time is the underlying process of the education of mankind. But, he adds, in the later days of Enlightenment, “rational forces beg[a]n to

²³ Bacon, “The Great Instauration,” pp. 31–32.

²⁴ Charles Frankel credits Voltaire with this development: “Voltaire brought the tremendous social impact of the intellectual revolution most clearly into the open, and it was his elaboration of this theme that provided the greatest individual impulse to the development of ideas in progress.” Charles Frankel, *The Faith of Reason: The Idea of Progress in the French Enlightenment* (New York: 1948), p. 110.

assume direction of world history." While the moderns were certainly "confident of the purity of their empirical method" and "looked only at the facts[,] . . . often enough the[ir] categorical denial of innate ideas or a priori axioms was only a preparatory device which preceded a dogmatic affirmation of innate sentiments or principles of behavior."²⁵

As Manuel suggests, the theorists tended to attribute an absoluteness to the way the world of experience actually worked, as modeled on the order and regularity of the mathematical laws of nature. Similarly, their understanding of the relationship between knowing and its application to the social world was modeled on the relationship implicit in the mathematical model: it was as mimetic a making as that of the Divine Architect. In this sense the moderns did not secularize the *theological* conception of divine creativity. Their understanding of the nature of God's generative power was a variation of the onto-theological view that making is conditioned by knowing, with the significant addition—adopted to alleviate the determinism inherent in the Stoic conception that providential guidance is immanent in the world in the form of reason—that knowledge frees humans to realize the rational goals they set for themselves.

If measured by the criterion of a strong assertion of human agency in the historical world—that is, of the application of knowledge to constructive making and doing and of the freedom to choose, and achieve, one's goals—then, among the Enlightenment writers I discuss, Voltaire, Turgot, and Condorcet, only Condorcet is a strong believer in progress. While all share onto-theological assumptions, Voltaire and Turgot either doubt the power of reason to master human nature or are unable to give to humans what belongs to God. Voltaire is the least theoretical figure I discuss, and it is his very indifference to theory that protects him from the certain belief in human progress that characterizes later Enlightenment writers. No historical development can change the fact that, for him, "the bulk of the human race has always been, and will long remain, senseless and stupid."²⁶

There is certainly evidence in Voltaire's writings to support the claim that he believes in historical progress. Since he also believes that human nature is stable and that folly, stupidity, incredulity, superstition, and moral evil are inevitable characteristics of human behavior, there is

²⁵ Frank Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (New York, 1962), p. 17.

²⁶ Voltaire, "Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of Nations," in *The Age of Louis XIV and Other Selected Writings*, trans. J.H. Brumfitt (New York, 1963), pp. 254–55.

also sufficient evidence to attribute a more pessimistic view to him. Henry Vyverberg has culled from Voltaire's writings passages supporting both positions.²⁷ Rather than repeat that effort, I shall account for what I believe to be Voltaire's pessimism with reference to his unwillingness—or inability—to accept the assumptions that, I argue, allow the 18th century its belief in progress. Though Voltaire believes, with his contemporaries, that the age has attained knowledge of the rational order of nature, knowledge is, ultimately, not sufficient. It can determine neither the course of human making nor the cumulative results of historical development. His lack of faith in the inevitable unity of scientific knowledge and human agency helps to explain—indeed, it may have determined—his pessimism about history.

In taking issue with Rousseau's assessment that, though man is capable of improvement, history actually reveals "that he has become perverted", Voltaire cites those improvements in economic, social, and political conditions; in the periodic conquest of ignorance, superstition, cruelty, pettiness, injustice, and immorality; and in the development of language, culture, and the arts.²⁸ The more important reason for optimism, however, is the presence of a universal principle of reason in nature and in man. Taking for granted the "naturalness" of that principle, Voltaire says God has "given us the principle of universal reason just as he has given feathers to birds and furs to bears, and this principle is so constant that it continues to exist despite all the passions which fight against it." This principle is even the source of morality: "The knowledge of a God who created the universe, rewarded virtue and punished vice, is fruit of a cultivated reason," down to "the principles of commiseration and justice" that most primitive people "carry in [their] heart[s]." The crudity of the earliest forms of religious beliefs can be explained as merely a failure to "understand the relations between all the different parts of the universe, these innumerable ends and means which announce to wise men the existence of an eternal architect."²⁹

The presence of that God-given principle of reason in nature and man also insures for Voltaire the possibility of knowledge. The degree to which knowledge has been attained is for him the measure of the degree to which progress has been realized in different civilizations, and tellingly,

²⁷ Henry Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 175–79.

²⁸ Voltaire, "Customs," pp. 259–60.

²⁹ Voltaire, "Customs," pp. 249–50 and 263.

what he considers “knowledge” is limited to the collection of astronomical observations made by the Chaldeans and the Chinese.³⁰ He dismisses Athenian science as “the system of children” and does not have much to say about the state of science in the West until he gets to his own “fortunate age”, which has witnessed a “revolution in the human spirit.”³¹ He has high praise for the extent to which the mathematical sciences have been enhanced by the empirical and experimental sciences. This situation is the main reason for the optimism he sometimes expresses:

One cannot but believe that reason and human industry will continue to make further progress; that the useful arts will be developed; that prejudices . . . will gradually disappear[;] . . . and that philosophy, widespread throughout the world, will go some way toward consoling human nature for the calamities which it will suffer in every age.³²

Despite, however, Voltaire's delight in the level of scientific knowledge attained by the 18th century, despite his insistence that “one cannot but believe that reason and human industry” will ultimately prevail, his insight into human nature, as manifest in its history, undermines his assurance that rational knowledge can determine human action. While he gives many examples of the more reasonable temper of his age, he knows that the “fanaticism, to which men have a strong inclination, has always served not only to make them stupider but also . . . wicked” and is still present. A poignant example of the limitations of reason—or at least of the limitations of rational men—is found in Descartes. Voltaire puts the failings of his philosophy in a wider, more optimistic perspective, but its very existence hits too close to home. Descartes, he writes, “was the greatest geometer of his time, but his mind was too prone to invent, and the greatest of mathematicians produced nothing but romances in the field of philosophy”.³³

Voltaire has too strong a sense of the continuing prevalence of passion, superstition, fanaticism, intolerance, injustice, inequality, and prejudice in the social world; of the force of habit, custom, and environment; and of the unpredictability of chance and circumstance to believe that the progressive application of rational knowledge will transform the level of

³⁰ Voltaire, “History, From the Philosophical Dictionary,” in *The Age of Louis XIV*, pp. 314–15; Voltaire, “Customs,” pp. 269–70 and 275–83.

³¹ Voltaire, “Customs,” p. 301.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³³ Voltaire, “The Age of Louis XIV,” in *The Age of Louis XIV*, p. 165.

human social behavior. For whatever reason, he cannot rid himself of his belief in the enduring senselessness and stupidity of the human race, a sense as strong in him as his belief in the presence of a "universal principle of reason."

Voltaire's inability to believe that human making or doing can ever be completely conditioned by human knowledge may also relate to his doubt that, with the attainment of a certain level of reason and scientific knowledge, humans would be free to act on that knowledge and realize their goals. Indeed, as Vyverberg points out, Voltaire not only doubts the human ability to act; he does not believe that humans can will to act. For Voltaire, human willing has never been free: choice is always determined by external necessity. "If pressed", Vyverberg says, "Voltaire would have granted that even reason must act within the framework of determinism, and that man's proudest achievements are ultimately not the fruit of free will but of fate".

Voltaire is right, however, to doubt the human ability to will freely: historically and philosophically, the belief in free will has always been tied to the conviction that only reason gives humans that ability while, at the same time, always limiting and determining that freedom. But Vyverberg is right in concluding that, though believing in determinism, Voltaire *treats* man as a free agent. Even as he does so, however, Voltaire is never optimistic about the relationship between rational action and its ability to realize rational goals—the conviction implicit in that relationship that the freedom to act rationally gives humans the ability to realize their goals. For Voltaire, as Charles Frankel writes, "the very triumph of Reason sometimes seem[s] . . . happily fortuitous."³⁴

The difference between Voltaire and the most optimistic Enlightenment writers is that the latter are convinced that rationally determined choices in the human world bring about increasingly rational institutions. They, at least implicitly, assume an analogy between the unity of their scientific knowledge and their praxis, and that of the Divine Architect's making, conditioned, as it was, by his knowledge of ideal forms. Though it is clear that, for a rational God, rationally conditioned making necessarily produces a rational artifact, Voltaire is not convinced that human reason is sufficiently strong or pervasive enough to eradicate or control the irrationality he perceives in human nature and history. His pessimism

³⁴ Frankel, *The Faith of Reason*, p. 109.

enables him to resist the secularizing analogy between man and *any* deity, whatever the nature of the divine power.³⁵

Turgot and Voltaire were both writing in midcentury, but, despite his acknowledgement of the errors and evils that were, ultimately, so compelling for Voltaire, Turgot produced a more orderly, coherent view of a history that he was willing to deem “progressive.” Turgot also, alone among the *philosophes*, appears to give Providence a causal role in the process, but about this interpretation there is disagreement. J.B. Bury says Turgot “occasionally refers to Providence, but this is no more than a prudent lip service. Providence has no function in his scheme.”³⁶ Frankel and Vyverberg, focusing on Turgot’s belief in the apparent inevitability of progress, claim that his version is wholly dependent on Providence. For Frankel, “[t]he coming together of Progress and Providence . . . is so striking that one might hold [Turgot] to be a rebel” against the empiricism, naturalism, and secularism of the age.³⁷

Manuel provides a more nuanced assessment. Turgot, he says, provides a modern version of the age-old problem of theodicy in Christianity—a justification of the ways of God to man, ways that include much evil, error, and violence in human nature, society, and history. “The war of good and evil, of Christianity and anti-Christianity, became the war of progressive history and anti-history . . . The doctrine of progress was born in the bosom of Christianity.”³⁸ Turgot, Manuel believes, explains the prevalence of evil and the passions as the very means of bringing about ultimate good. With that functional explanation of the role of Providence, Manuel presents Turgot as the “true initiator of the rational prophetic tradition . . . First among moderns he foretold the future of reason.” Indeed, Manuel ultimately attributes to him an unqualified optimism in believing that, in his age, humans had reached a level of knowledge that gave them control over an inevitably progressive future. Manuel quotes from a letter in Condorcet’s *Vie de Turgot* in which Turgot says, “To know the truth in order to make the social world conform to it, that is the sole source of public happiness. It is therefore useful, even necessary, to extend the limits of knowledge.”³⁹

³⁵ See Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism*, pp. 175–79.

³⁶ J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920), p. 154.

³⁷ Frankel, pp. 125–26; Vyverberg, p. 63.

³⁸ Manuel, *Prophets*, p. 46.

³⁹ Manuel, p. 322, n.38. The reference is to Condorcet’s *Vie de Turgot* (London, 1786), p. 251.

This conclusion leaves the question of agency in history still ambiguous for Turgot, however. Is Providence a conceit in a narrative intended to provide a moral frame for a secular view of history, or does it play an essential—that is, causal—role in human history? Or perhaps the more telling question is whether there is *any* conception of effective human agency in Turgot's historical writings at all. Do humans *ever* act in the world, in Habermas's words, "with will and consciousness"? Turgot himself never answers that question, or, in not answering it directly, effectively answers it in the negative.

Turgot's conception of progress avoids the extremes apparent in some of his contemporaries—the pessimism that keeps Voltaire from committing himself to a progressive view of history, or the absolute certainty with which Condorcet maps out the course of that progress. At the beginning of his first Sorbonne lecture he sharply distinguishes human history from natural processes and identifies the forces that allow humans to escape the "constraint of laws that confine it to a circle of ever the same revolutions . . . Reason, the passions, liberty . . . incessantly produce new events." All preceding ages are linked together by a chain of cause and effect, while the signs of language and of writings have given humans the means of possessing and communicating their ideas, making all previous knowledge "a common treasure". Yet the very conditions that allow history to escape the "constraint of laws"—the influences of reason, the passions, liberty, evil, error, and chance events—are so variable and unequal, often working against one another, that history appears to be no more than a constant flux of events in which nations and periods alternately wax and wane. Despite Turgot's insistence that the whole of human history is united in a linear causal chain, one might doubt whether it exhibits any development at all. Turgot himself admits, "I seek the progress of the human mind, and I see almost nothing but the history of its errors."⁴⁰

What constitutes the possibility of progress for Turgot is, ironically, the frequent, if unequally distributed, occurrences of novelty, innovation, and inexplicable change. Turgot attributes such consequential occurrences to two primary causes—chance events and the periodic appearance of genius. In discussing the latter, Turgot says "Nature" bestows her talents unequally and "has given to certain minds an abundance of talents

⁴⁰ Turgot, Anne Robert Jacques, "Discourse at the Sorbonne of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind," in *Life and Writings of Turgot*, ed. W. Walker Stephens (London, 1895), pp. 159–63.

which she has refused to others". Of even greater importance than genius, however, are the circumstances in which genius appears: "circumstances develop these talents, or leave them buried in obscurity, and to the infinite variety of these circumstances is due the inequality in the progress of nations".⁴¹ Environment, political and economic conditions, and the level of complexity attained by language at the time of the appearance of genius all determine the significance that particular occurrences of genius will have on the course of future events. Chance and genius are particularly significant in overcoming long periods of stasis among societies that have become stagnant—China and Egypt are notable examples. Change—any change—is always ultimately a good: "No mutation has been made which has not brought about some benefit, for none has been made without evolving experience, and without extending or improving, or at least preparing for man's education."⁴²

Perhaps the most telling feature of Turgot's account of history—one that may account for his optimism but also one that makes it difficult to identify specific causes of specific effects—is that he attributes to it what is in effect a dialectical process. History is not merely a series of alternations; the pattern of alternations is, for Turgot, *itself the very engine of history*. The frequency of error, evil, and violence is not dysfunctional after all but rather plays a necessary role in the progressive movement of history. Barbarism, for example, is mitigated by the very violence of its nature: a barbarous nation, mixing with more civilized peoples, "as conquered receives arts and laws along with servitude, or as conquerors yield to the natural empire of reason and of policy over force". Governments arise at first out of war, "and the ambitious themselves, in forming great nations, have unconsciously contributed to the will of Providence, to the progress of enlightenment, and consequently to the increase of happiness of the human race".⁴³ The passions, too, so often the despair of pessimists, have a role to play in the positive outcome of the dialectic:

[D]angerous passions become a principle of action, and consequently of progress; everything that draws men from their actual state . . . in the long run conducts them to the good and the true . . . [O]dious passions . . . were . . . the leading-strings, with which Nature and its Author have conducted the infancy of the human race.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Turgot, "Discourse," p. 161.

⁴² Turgot, "Notes on Universal History," in *Life and Writings of Turgot*, p. 182.

⁴³ Turgot, "Notes," pp. 181–82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Alternately, reason is not a uniformly positive force in history. Occurring too soon in a nation's history, "[r]eason . . . would have banished war and usurpations, and would have left men divided[,] . . . all speaking different languages."⁴⁵

Turgot's qualified response to the "positive" effects his contemporaries attribute to mind, reason, and knowledge is to reinforce the dialectical relationship between the passions and reason. In other writings Turgot is certainly an enthusiastic believer in the progressive effects of reason and of the application of mathematical knowledge to the human world, but this unqualified optimism is not apparent in his historical writings. In them he expresses doubt that the mathematical sciences have insured the general spread of enlightenment. Of the "Mussulman" Arabs in the Middle Ages, he says, "Through them mathematics was extended and expounded, a science less dependent than the other sciences . . . on justness of mind."⁴⁶ In other societies too—China, Egypt, Athens, Alexandria—mind was not itself sufficient to effect change. Too much depends on circumstance, environment, political liberty, equality, and chance to prevent societies, despite their high level of knowledge, from sinking into a monotonous stability. Nor is there a "divine convergence" or necessary relation among knowing, making, and doing in human action.

The dialectical relation among the conflicting influences of error, evil, the passions, chance, and occurrences of genius, as well as of reason, mind, and knowledge, keeps Turgot from attributing to humans the first requirement of a secular view of history—a conception of agency sufficient to enable them to act in the historical world "with will and consciousness". And yet Turgot insists that history does advance and does so even without human agency. Though he claims that to "unveil the influence of general and necessary causes, along with that of particular causes, and that of the free action of great men, to discover the springs and mechanism of moral causes is History in the eyes of a philosopher", he himself demurs in identifying those "springs and mechanisms". In laying out his plan for his historical writings, he wishes, he says, only "to indicate, I do not attempt to elucidate causes".⁴⁷ But his "indications" are not adequate—they do not account for the continuous progress he attributes to the whole of history before the point at which the dominance of the mathematical sciences,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Turgot, "Discourse," p. 169.

⁴⁷ Turgot, "Notes," p. 175.

enriched by empirical method, finally gives humans that convergence of knowing, doing, and making sufficient to choose, to act, and to realize progressive goals. What Manuel considers Turgot's theodicy, his explanation of the workings of God, is a making by the hidden hand of God that brings together the heterogenous ends—rational and irrational—that humans realize but do not themselves intend, goals that constitute the progressive chain of cause and effect that Turgot finds in history before the modern age.

It is only at that point that humans are finally able, by the level of knowledge they have attained, to exercise any control over their future development. And just how does that moment finally come about? "Different causes of events take their rise in the different countries of the world", Turgot says, "and all, by however many separate roads, concur at last to the same end—to advance the human mind." Nations begin to form stable governments, war against the Mussulmen in Palestine unites Christian states, different forms of political organizations arise, languages become refined, the Ottomans spread ancient Greek science to the West, and then "[a]n art suddenly arises by which are spread . . . the thoughts and the glory of the great men of the past . . . [A]fter so many ages, it occurs . . . to some obscure man that characters might be impressed on paper."⁴⁸

The printing press brings together from obscurity the multiplicity of facts, experiences, and instruments of ingenious operations, which "the practice of the arts had accumulated during so many ages", and it becomes the "foundation of a natural history and philosophy hitherto unknown . . . [O]n all sides attentive eyes are fixed on that". The invention of the telescope and the works of Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Bacon, and even, despite his errors, of "Great Descartes" quickly follow. "[A]t last all the clouds are dissipated . . . [W]hat a crown of great men on all paths of knowledge! What perfection of human reason!"⁴⁹ All have followed from the invention of the printing press, yet Turgot does not invest even that act with the determined knowing of an agent. It is the remarkable—nay, miraculous—act of an "obscure" genius that moves the world "from darkness to enlightenment", a genius whose emergence seems to have more to do with providential guidance than with the secularization of any sense of "divine" agency. Yet if Turgot had attributed to this "obscure man" a divine

⁴⁸ Turgot, "Discourse," pp. 170–72.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

unity of knowing and making that had produced the printing press, would that act have been conditioned by knowledge of the technologies of the past, or would it have been the unconditioned creativity of a genius? If the former, Turgot's "genius" would have been, as Manuel calls it, the precursor of "Hegel's daemonic world-historical hero-monster, the embodiment of Spirit at a crucial *Moment*".⁵⁰ If the latter, it would have been a far more radical act than the novel or innovative events of genius—it would have been the singular attribution to humans of the creativity of the God of Genesis by a progress theorist.

Much is made in the literature of Turgot's high estimate of Christianity as against the anticlericalism of the *philosophes*. Yes, he praises the "new light" that emerged as the Roman Empire fell, "more precious a thousand times than even that of letters and philosophy. Holy Religion!"⁵¹ But it is not Turgot's estimate of Christianity that prevents his conception of history from being a secular one—it is his account of human history itself. For him, any effect that human actions have in maintaining an inevitable course of progress before the 17th century is due wholly to the unintended results of events caused by chance and the fortuitous emergence of genius—or by a Providence that insures those results. Despite Manuel's paeon to Turgot as the Prophet of Reason leading to Comte, Turgot's belief in the rationality of human history is wholly dependent on his certainty that in time progress will result from the heterogeneity of chance events that could not, on their own, achieve a continuous progressive course. There is as much truth as felicitousness in his comment in a letter to Condorcet: "I confess to you that my gout has not prevented me from still believing in final causes . . . [T]he sum of good will be greater than evil".⁵²

The question of whether the Enlightenment conception of historical progress is a secularization of providential guidance—and, if so, whether that view is a theological or a philosophical model for human agency—is answerable primarily with reference to Condorcet's philosophy of history. It is only in Condorcet that the assumptions of the progressivists come together in a fully realized theory of progress. As such, Condorcet's version differs markedly from the tentative formulations of Bacon, Voltaire, and even Turgot, on whom Condorcet drew. With them, Condorcet assumes

⁵⁰ Manuel, *Prophets*, p. 27. Manuel points out that Turgot had "real misgivings about man's complete immersion in the universe of the natural philosophers . . . [and] was not without hidden doubts about its application to the social sciences" (*Prophets*, p. 19).

⁵¹ Turgot, "Discourse," p. 168.

⁵² Turgot, Letter to Condorcet, 21 June 1772, in *Life and Writings of Turgot*, p. 276.

that the historical process is characterized most notably by the accumulation of rational knowledge, the model of which is mathematics; that the application of mathematical method to the physical world gives humans control of physical processes; and that that method, applied analogously to the moral and social world, gives humans control over their historical development.

The conception of human agency that gives humans the constructive power to achieve their “perfectibility”—that is, the unity of human knowing, making, and doing in the social world—is not characterized explicitly by Condorcet as a “divine” attribute. Rather, he insists on the naturalness, the very *humanity*, of this unity: insofar as humans are rational, it is their birthright! It is, however, a power previously attributed only to God, and its possession accounts for Condorcet’s optimism, an optimism much greater than that of earlier writers and greater than that warranted by Condorcet’s assumptions. What fuels Condorcet’s certainty, his unwavering belief in the inevitable, infinite progress of humans towards perfectibility, is his transformation of “reason” into the idealist version of “rationality” with which he insures that progress.

Condorcet is himself acutely aware that the delusions of theology and the duplicity of the priestly caste in perpetrating those delusions are themselves the *products* of reason, and that, in deceiving the gullible, reason eventually seduces those who use it to manipulate others. His conception of reason is, like Turgot’s, inherently dialectical. His emphasis on reason’s insidious ability to dupe those who use reason to deceive others is so strong that it raises an intriguing question. Is reason’s ultimate deception that of convincing its most passionate disciple that humans have become so rational that they are now incapable of being deceived? Is Condorcet the victim of a tragic irony, that of using rational arguments to invest humans with the power of a rational God, thus turning them into the very “divinity” from whom he hoped to free them?

These questions are warranted because Condorcet does not make the case he claims to make: his arguments are inherently contradictory. He adopts Locke’s sensationalist psychology in the Introduction to the *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* to trace the emergence of human reason from its earliest manifestation, a process that culminates, in the modern age, in a rationalist conception of reason not based on empiricism at all but closer to Platonic or Cartesian idealism. Similarly, he turns to history to support his claims for the historical development of that rationalist conception of reason, producing an account that is patently “unhistorical”—admittedly speculative in its

early stages and highly selective in the latter. And, on the basis of his belief in the absolute authority of his nonempirical, nonhistorical, rationalist conception of the human mind, he predicts an infinitely perfectible future by means of the application of rational method to every decision made in the moral and social worlds, an application so total it determines even the universality of taste, one that, if fully realized, would *end* a truly *historical* process as much as would the realization of Hegel's absolute Spirit.⁵³ There is not the slightest doubt in Condorcet—of the sort that had plagued Voltaire and Turgot—that the presence of passion, conflict, error, evil, and chance in human history undermines the inevitability of progress. The charge Vyverberg makes against the progress theorists applies far more to Condorcet than to the others:

[T]here existed a faith in human reason which to the latter-day skeptic must appear boundless . . . At no time does the empiricism of hard facts . . . seriously challenge the imperatives of rational idealism. In not one of these thinkers . . . does probabilism receive more than lip service . . . [E]ach is thoroughly convinced that his rational powers have shown him the true principles and goals of mankind's development.⁵⁴

The easy leap from "observations" based on "perceptions" and "conjecture" to absolute claims about the lawful structure of a rational historical process is evident throughout the *Sketch*. The rationalism of the mathematical method and of scientific knowledge begins for him in the familiar Lockean process by which the mind receives and combines sensations. The pleasure and pain that accompany sensations produce feelings that form bonds among humans, becoming the basis of common moral sentiments that determine the continuity, unity, and causal relationships of history. The first two stages of Condorcet's *Sketch* include the development of language—the characteristic that distinguishes humans from animals—and the beginnings of certain arts. At this point Condorcet has what he calls a "truly historical" picture: "Philosophy has nothing more to guess, no more hypothetical surmises to make; it is enough to assemble and order the facts and to show the useful truths that can be derived from their connections and their totality." He will sketch "the progress reserved for future generations, which the constancy of the laws of nature seem to assure them", demonstrating how nature has joined the progress of

⁵³ Condorcet, "Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind," *Condorcet: Selected Writings*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Indianapolis, 1976), p. 253.

⁵⁴ Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism*, pp. 71–72.

knowledge, liberty, virtue, and respect for the natural rights of man, that, “[t]hough so often separated[,] . . . [must] become inseparable from the moment when enlightenment has attained a certain level.”⁵⁵

Reason itself is nothing other than the cumulative growth of its powers, and that growth is as much a function of the errors it produces as of its effort to overcome those errors. The most oppressive scourge—the delusions of religion—originates in the generalizations derived from the “stock of observations” made in “sedentary and peaceable societies” in the areas of astronomy, medicine, anatomy, plants, and minerals. These become the basis of the power of certain families who comprise a priestly caste. The progress of the sciences is secondary to their pursuit of power: “They sought truth only to diffuse errors”, and “at last they became themselves the dupes of their own fables.”⁵⁶

Far more insidious than the superstitious uses to which the priests put the delusions they create are the errors of philosophers. Condorcet refers to the fantasies of ancient philosophers in terms as disdainful as those he uses against the priests. The philosophers were misled by their desire to “reduce nature to one principle only, and the phenomena of the universe to one law. Thus, instead of discovering truths, they forged systems”, neglecting the observation of facts, pursuing chimeras of their imagination, and defending them with subtleties.⁵⁷ The object of Condorcet’s harshest criticism, because he is the one who should have known better, is Aristotle. Aristotle knew that “our ideas, even such as are most abstract, most strictly intellectual[,] . . . have their origin in our sensations”, but he failed to demonstrate this truth.⁵⁸

To Condorcet, the triumph of Christianity was the signal for the decline of the sciences and of philosophy. The greatest accomplishments of the medieval period were due to the Arabs, who enriched the most important achievements of the ancients, their mathematical theories. The Arabs translated Aristotle and cultivated astronomy, optics, and other mathematical sciences.⁵⁹ The dialectical nature of reason is apparent in Condorcet’s discussion of the scholastic philosophy built on translations of Aristotle. Scholasticism does not lead to truth “nor even serve for the

⁵⁵ Condorcet, “Sketch,” pp. 213–16.

⁵⁶ “Condorcet,” *Outline of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*, translated from the French (Philadelphia, 1796), Online Library of Liberty, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1669>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

discussion and accurate valuation of its proofs", but it whets the minds of men, and the analytic skill it nurtured "was the original source of that philosophical analysis to which we have since been so highly indebted for our intellectual progress. But this method", he concludes, "could not fail to retard in the schools the advancement of the natural sciences."

The unrelenting idealism of Condorcet's conception of human making is underscored by his general lack of interest in technical or material making. In one of his few references to the arts, he refers to the "wonderful production" of the "servile industry" but adds that he finds "nothing in them which announces the inspiration of genius"; rather, he merely finds "the slow and painful work of reiterated practice." "Amidst this labour which astonishes us," he writes, we see the "marks of ignorance and stupidity that disclose its origin."⁶⁰ High praise is reserved, however, for the invention of the printing press. With it we "come to that point of civilization . . . at which the people derive a profit from intellectual knowledge . . . The arch of the sciences is rapid and brilliant."

Condorcet enthuses over the modern age's grasp of the powers of algebra; the invention of logarithms; the discoveries of Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton and particularly those of Bacon and Descartes. Bacon "revealed the true method of studying nature . . . by employing the three instruments with which she has furnished us for the discovery of her secrets, observation, experiment, and calculation." Though possessing "the genius of philosophy", Bacon, however, added "not thereto the genius of the sciences".⁶¹

Descartes, on the other hand, "joined example to precept . . . in exhibiting the method of finding and ascertaining truth. This method he applied to the discovery of . . . a new branch of mathematical science . . . [and] wished to extend his method to every object of human intelligence."⁶² Descartes brings philosophy "back to reason", understanding that reason "must be derived entirely from those primary and evident truths which we can discover by observing the operations of the human mind." But Descartes is another example of the insidious dialectic of reason. He must be rescued from his errors by Locke, who reduces Descartes's "primary and evident truths to their immediate origin in sensations." Condorcet himself does not see any conflict between Descartes's "primary and evident

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

truths" and their derivation from sensations. Rather, this "metaphysical method becomes virtually a universal instrument", forever imposing "a barrier between mankind and its early errors, a barrier sure to save it from further errors."⁶³

At this point there emerges a class of men, Voltaire among them, concerned not with discovering truth but with propagating it: from their efforts come an understanding of the rights of men and, ultimately, "the doctrine of the indefinite perfectibility of the human race."⁶⁴ What makes perfectibility possible is that, just as Descartes had shown that the "final objective of the sciences . . . [is] to subject all truths to the rigor of calculation", Newton discovers calculus, "containing the principles of all universal instruments applicable to all . . . ideas."⁶⁵ For Condorcet it is the application of the calculus of probability to every social problem that insures not just the possibility but also the inevitability, the necessity, of human progress.

In making this claim, Condorcet responds to the charge that science cannot be applied to problems of social utility:

*All errors in politics and morals are based on philosophical errors, and these . . . are connected with scientific errors. There is not a religious system nor a supernatural extravagance that is not founded on ignorance of the laws of nature . . . Convinced that men in their day knew everything that they could ever know[,] . . . [t]he inventors, the defenders of these absurdities[,] confidently supported their idle dreams on the current opinions of the country and their age.*⁶⁶

Condorcet illustrates the benefits that will occur in the future by applying the calculus of probabilities to problems of social utility. The greatest social problem is inequality, and the most effective means of dealing with inequality is through education commensurate with the cumulative development of knowledge. Since calculus gives us the ability to synthesize all knowledge, and since "education rectifies natural inequality[,] . . . the social art will have fulfilled its aim, that of extending to all men . . . the[ir] common rights . . . [and] achieving the absolute perfection of the human race."⁶⁷

⁶³ Condorcet, "Sketch," pp. 225–26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 236–38.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250; italics added.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 266–7.

Condorcet's method, the calculus of probability, is what distinguishes his theory of progress from all other 18th-century versions. In elevating the significance of human agency, the earlier progressists understood action in traditional terms, as the control of reason over doing and making, and argued that rational control gave humans freedom to realize their choices despite passion, evil, and chance. Condorcet puts the question of human agency on a different level. If scientific method is, for the age, the means by which humans become subjects of scientific knowledge and agents of its application, for Condorcet human reason has *itself* become "subject" to a method that controls *reason's* choices. Reason has become *rationality*, and its application, *techne*. Application is not a matter of free will: "choice" is irrelevant to the issue of rational decision. Condorcet has drawn to its logical conclusion the determinism inherent in the traditional relationship among reason, doing, and making, and he accepts the necessity that knowing imposes in a way Voltaire and Turgot did not. "Choice" is a matter of the "social art": when calculus determines the right decision, no rational being would fail to implement it. Method shows

the probability of a class of phenomena being the result of the intention of an intelligent being or . . . other preceding or coexisting phenomena; the probability too that must be attributed to that necessary and unknown cause which we call chance, a word whose true meaning can be determined only by the study of this calculus. These applications have also taught us to recognize . . . the degree of likelihood an opinion must possess before we can adopt it.⁶⁸

The social art can even tell us what accounts for the "occurrences" of genius that Turgot finds so miraculous, "[w]hat precisely constitutes . . . the talent of invention, that primary faculty . . . [of] genius by which the mind . . . make[s] discoveries".⁶⁹ Even moral sentiments and actions are subject to calculation.

Is not a *mistaken sense of interest* the most common cause of actions contrary to the general welfare, . . . is not the violence of our passions often the result *either of habits that we have adopted through miscalculation*, or of our *ignorance* over how to . . . rule them? Is not the habit of reflection upon conduct, of listening to the deliverance of reason[,] . . . of identify[ing] our happiness with others, the *necessary* consequence of a study of morality . . . Just as the mathematical and physical sciences tend to improve the arts that we use to satisfy our simplest needs, is it not also part of the

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

necessary order of nature that the moral and political sciences should exercise a similar influence upon *the motives that direct our feelings and our actions?* [italics added]

Do not all these observations, Condorcet concludes, “show that the moral goodness of man, the necessary consequences of his constitution, is capable of indefinite perfection . . . and that nature has linked together in an unbreakable chain truth, happiness, and virtue?”⁷⁰

Condorcet can embrace the absoluteness, the determinism, inherent in his application of calculus to the social world because, ultimately, he shares the underlying assumptions of idealist metaphysics. Despite his conviction that he derives his philosophy from sensations received from experience, his unquestioned belief that the ills of human nature are a function of *ignorance* of the laws of nature and error, a *miscalculation* of human needs, or a *mistaken* sense of interest is as idealist and rationalist as Plato’s belief that moral transgressions are the result not of the appetites but of ignorance. Not even the Divine Architect can do other than mimetically reproduce rational order. But Condorcet’s belief that human activity is the application of rational choices as determined by calculus does not “secularize” that onto-theological deity. There is *no* deity for him *other* than the rational order of the natural world.

Frankel makes a strong argument that Condorcet’s conception of method is not merely a “scientific” belief in “absolute foundations moving towards a final Truth” but rather is a defensible method free of the *esprit de système* the *philosophes* so abhorred. Resting “upon continuity with what had been done as well as upon a critical revision, simplification, and enlargement of received materials”, Condorcet’s method is “self-controlling and self-directing . . . The immeasurable superiority of the modern age lay in its having brought to self-consciousness . . . a progressing method of inquiry.”⁷¹

But Frankel does not go on to address a more disturbing question. Since Condorcet believes, as Frankel says he does, that “science was model social behavior”, what happens to the *historicity* of Condorcet’s philosophy when he claims that model as the *only* useful, just, and rational one for *every* future social concern? The problem with Condorcet’s philosophy of history is not with his conception of method *per se*; it is with the absoluteness and totality with which it is applied to *every* social issue. That

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 273–4.

⁷¹ Frankel, *The Faith of Reason*, pp. 44–46.

“technologizing” of the relationship among knowing, making, and doing makes a historical sensibility impossible: “historical action” so determined is inherently unhistorical.

In relation to the question I raised above—whether Condorcet fell victim to the dialectic of reason that can ensnare its disciples—it is instructive to read the last paragraph of the *Sketch*. Condorcet speaks with great feeling of how consoling it is for the philosopher who laments the errors, crimes, and injustices that still pollute the earth “to contemplate the advance of the human race . . . Such contemplation is an asylum in which the memory of his persecutors cannot pursue him . . . [T]here he lives with his peers in an Elysium created by reason and graced by the purest pleasures known to the love of mankind.”⁷² Condorcet’s contemplation of an inevitable, infinitely progressive future was reason’s seductive way of rewarding him for his faith in the rational method, a consolation he could not refuse.

I began this exploration of the secularization thesis with Habermas’s claim that not only the theory of progress but also the philosophy of history itself begins in the 18th century with Vico’s secularization of a predicate previously attributed only to God, the unity of knowing and making. Concerned with the development of a critical philosophy of history, Habermas understands “convergence” as the priority of knowing to making: for him, *verum/factum* is an epistemological principle. I question the sense in which that conception of human agency, based as it is on philosophy’s privileging of reason, is “theological.” When a rationalized conception of God became dominant in the West in the medieval syncretic process, the *theological* conception of God originating in the biblical tradition, that of a God whose knowing and creating are united, whose creative act brings the object of knowledge into existence, was lost.

The most influential attribution to humans of creative power—and of the power to create as God had done, with language that itself creates that which is knowable—was not made until Nietzsche identified humans as artists rather than knowers. But already in the 18th century, in the *New Science*, Vico too had called humans poets, creators who possess a divine power, an originary language with which to create a concretely real, meaningful human world—and with it their human existence. A comparison between Vico’s view of human agency and philosophical formulations of the theories of progress illustrates, I believe, the distinction

⁷² Condorcet, “Sketch,” *Ibid.*, p. 281.

between a secularized theological and secular onto-theological conceptions of history.

In the interpretation that follows I argue that alone in the 18th century Vico secularized the radical theological conception of divine agency manifest in the Hebrew scripture, the unity of divine knowing and making. Most interpretations of the *New Science* understand the figure of Providence so central to it as a transcendent God, insuring, as with Turgot, that choices made on the basis of "individual needs and utilities" "miraculously" serve social ends; or the Neoplatonic variant of this view, a Providence who accomplishes his purpose by means of an Ideal Eternal Law that governs historical process. Both versions empty Vico's claim that humans can know the historical world because they make it. If the human world is made by Providence, human knowing must be limited to the historical narratives made by the philosopher-historians of the third age. Vico, however, is quite specific in the *New Science* that he is attributing a "divine" creativity to humans, and emphasizes that it is distinguishable from the epistemic making of the Neoplatonic God. In describing the poetic creation of the human world by the theological fathers, he says that

this creation was infinitely different from that of God. For God, in his purest intelligence, knows things, and, by knowing them creates them; but they, in their robust ignorance, did it by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination. And because it was quite corporeal, they did it with marvelous sublimity; a sublimity such and so great that it excessively perturbed the very persons who by imagining did the creating, for which they were called "poets," which is Greek for "creators".⁷³

⁷³ Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (1948; repr. Ithaca, 1961), 376. (References to the *New Science* are to paragraph numbers.) In my book *Vico's Uncanny Humanism* I develop at length the claim that the God whose divine creativity Vico attributed to his poetic creators was the God of Genesis. This interpretation is a radical departure from the scholarship on Vico, most of which accepts Vico's own estimate, in the *Autobiography*, that he is building on Plato's "ideal eternal law . . . after the idea or design of providence." For this reason most interpretations of Vico are predominantly idealist. Benedetto Croce's influential work, for example, considered Vico the source of the 19th century historicism that culminated in Hegel, and major Anglo writers such as Sir Isaiah Berlin and Donald Phillip Verene retain a fundamentally idealist perspective (See Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, New York, 1913; Sir Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, Vintage, 1977; Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, Ithaca, 1981). For all *verum/factum* is not an ontological principle but refers to the re-making by philosopher-historians of the making of the poets. The works of Ernesto Grassi are a notable exception, drawing on affinities between Vico's and Marx's conception of the human creation of the material, social world.

There have been interpretations which attempt to recover the causal efficacy of the biblical conception of divine creativity by emphasizing God's power and the linguistic

Vico may not have realized how far he had come from the Neoplatonic conception of God depicted in *Wisdom of the Ancients* or from the Platonic philosophy he claims influenced the *New Science*. In the *Autobiography* of 1725, he writes that from the time he first began to study Plato, he had been meditating an “ideal, eternal law that should be observed in a universal city after the idea or design of providence.”⁷⁴ But Vico would have been the first to realize that the effort to understand the corporeal imagination of the theological poets within the context of Platonic metaphysics was the conceit of scholars, “that what they know is as old as the world.”⁷⁵ By the last edition of the *New Science*, Vico has come to understand what he calls the master key of the *New Science*, “that the principal of these origins both of languages and of letters” is that the first gentile peoples, “by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters.” The effort to do so cost him “the persistent research of almost all his literary life”, he claims, because “with our civilized natures we [moderns] cannot at all imagine, and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men.”⁷⁶

Vico’s master key frees him from the conceits of Platonists, Cartesians, and *philosophes*, most of whom believe that humans are by nature not only rational but dualistic beings, possessing both a body and a subjective substance, whether soul, spirit, ego, consciousness, or mind. It had taken him 20 years to understand that the first men were not *merely* primitive thinkers, as are savages or children, but were not human *at all*. Beasts with wholly physical bodies, they were incapable of thought. What made them poets, that is, creators, were the skills of their bodies—perception, memory, and imagination (*ingenium*)—from which originated their concrete metaphoric language.⁷⁷ The process by which they made their human existence

nature of the creative process, but they undermine their efforts by retaining the Johannean conception of the Word as an emanation of spirit (See Karl Lowith, “*Verum et factum conventuntur: le premesse teologiche del principio di Vico e le loro conseguenze secolari*,” *Omaggio a Vico*, Naples, 1949; and John Milbank *The Religious Dimension of the Thought of Giambattista Vico*, Edwin Mellon Press, 1991). In the Hebraic scripture the creative Word is, however, not Logos but *Davar*. *Davar* is not an emanation of a spiritual God, but is itself an act of creative linguistic power, a “dynamic happening” at one and the same time the unity of word, deed, and thing. Thus *Davar*, as an act of ontological potency, retains the primacy of causal efficacy. Unconditioned by knowing, it creates that which is to be known. See my discussion of *Davar* in *Vico’s Uncanny Humanism*, pp. 31–7, 79–82, 159–67.

⁷⁴ Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography*, trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (1944; repr. Ithaca, 1963), p. 122.

⁷⁵ Vico, *New Science*, 127.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

with that language was neither a mimetic nor an organic one, nor can it be reduced to Lockean psychology or an inductive theory of knowledge. The generative activity of corporeal imaginations by means of a metaphoric language and the social practices and physical labor made possible by that language was ontological, bringing into existence that which did not exist in nature—a concrete, real, human social world.

Vico's insight into the poetic nature of the first men changed the significance of *verum/factum* in his later work. When first formulated in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, *verum/factum* is an epistemological claim that humans can know mathematics because they construct it.⁷⁸ Vico comes to realize that humans also make law, and in the 20 years it takes him to understand the abyssal nature of prehuman beings, it becomes the more radical ontological claim that the fathers of the gentiles were beings incapable of knowledge or even subjectivity: they were creators who created their concrete, real, meaningful historical world; its languages, gods, social practices, crafts, cultivated fields, walled cities, laws, social and political institutions, sciences, and philosophies—the three ages through which history moves, the ages of gods, heroes, and man. And he understands that, since “civil society has certainly been made by men[,] . . . men [can] come to know [it].”⁷⁹

Vico says his *New Science* is “new” because it brings together philosophy and philology. He will divine the *true*s of his new science, its principles, from made things, *facta*, the certainties (*certa*) of the historical world.⁸⁰ The repositories of originary language are ancient mythologies, the “true” histories of peoples who make their human world and who make sense

⁷⁸ Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, trans. L.M. Palmer (Ithaca, 1988), pp. 45–71. The skeptical aspect of *verum/factum*, its denial of knowledge of nature, was emphasized by thinkers as diverse as Cusa, Sanchez, Mersenne, and Locke.

⁷⁹ Vico, *New Science*, 331.

⁸⁰ In the context of dominant epistemological readings of Vico's principle, *verum* is generally rendered as “truth.” Max Fisch points out that the literal meaning *verum esse ipsum factum* is “the true is the thing made [or done] itself,” and explains translating *verum* as “trues” by saying “I depart from English usage in the direction of Vico's Latin. English permits us to speak . . . of the . . . true . . . but not of the trues. . . . But Vico's *verum* means the true, not the truth, and its plural *vera* means not the truths but the trues of intelligibles; . . . the things, other than sentences or propositions, that are true . . . in the transcendental sense of intelligible” (Max Fisch, “Vico and Pragmatism,” in *Giambattista Vico: an International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969, pp. 401–24, 407–8). Fisch's explanation still attributes an epistemological significance to the “true,” while I emphasize the ontological nature of the made as a “true thing.” For a fuller account of the epistemological nature of translations of Vico's *verum* see my discussion in *Vico's Uncanny Humanism*, pp. 123–4 and note 21.

of what they make with metaphoric language.⁸¹ From what is common in ancient myths, Vico surmises that all peoples experienced a flood and that after the flood *giganti* roamed the earth. They must have been descendants of the accursed sons of Noah, wandering for centuries in the forests, losing all social customs, becoming mute and incapable of thought. Living in their own filth, they lost even their human bodies, becoming *grossi bestioni*. Without the guidance of God, the fathers of the gentiles had to make their own human existence and did so with the concrete metaphoric language derived from their bodily skills—perception, memory, and imagination.⁸² Speculating on that process, Vico assumes the *giganti* experienced the world through random perceptions until some traumatic event—the sudden occurrence of thunder—awakened fear in them.⁸³ Looking up, they experienced the sensations of a turbulent sky, the sound of thunder, their newly awakened fear, and the shaking of their great bodies; and they uttered their first sound, *pa*, that inventively, imaginatively (*ingenium*) brought together in a metaphor sensations that in nature did not belong together, creating the image of a being in the sky. Vico calls *pa* a concrete metaphor or imaginative universal: with it the *giganti* created language, gods, and religion, and, forced by their terror to flee to caves to hide from that created God, the social practices of marriage and burial. In time the theological poets cleared the forests, built altars from which to read the auguries, cultivated the soil, erected walled cities, and created crafts, laws, and social institutions.⁸⁴ In doing so, the theological poets created their own human nature. Vico identifies *educare*, the practices of cleanliness, as the means by which the beasts reduced their bodies to human size and identifies *educere* as the practices by which they constructed abstract ideas and sciences, and, thus, the human mind.⁸⁵ Though Vico continually refers to “mind,” what makes abstract thought possible is the concrete social practices enabled by poetic language. The sciences, for example, originate with *contemplari*, the “contemplation,” that is, “observation . . . of the heavens with the bodily eyes” that takes place in the “science of the auguries” from which come the

⁸¹ Ibid. These mythologies are “true fables” since beings who make sense with concrete language are incapable of lying.

⁸² Ibid., 377.

⁸³ Ibid., 382. Vico stresses that fear was “awakened” in each beast.

⁸⁴ Ibid. The translators use the word *institutions* for the word Vico usually uses, *così*. I translate *così* as *things* to recover the concreteness and materiality of the human world created with language, social customs, and labor.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 520–24.

"first theorematata and mathematata[,] . . . things divine or sublime to contemplate[,] . . . eventuat[ing], in turn[,] in mathematical and metaphysical abstractions." This historical process is linguistic since "the first people wrote in the skies the history of their gods and heroes."⁸⁶ It is also ontological since with it "the founders of gentile humanity . . . imagined the gods[,] . . . invented languages[,] . . . founded families, . . . cities[,] . . . established the beginnings of things as all divine[,] . . . in a certain sense created themselves."⁸⁷

Unconditioned by knowledge, much less than by any form of subjectivity, the ontological process is driven by the necessity of satisfying human "needs and utilities". While individual choices are made on the basis of self-interest, the commonality of human needs and of the means by which those needs are met insures that individual choices do in fact satisfy *social* needs. Though Vico calls choice "free," "freedom" is nothing other than the ability "to hold in check the motions impressed on the mind by the body" (*conatus*). Awakened in the same event that aroused fear and created Jove, and thus religion, *conatus* forced the *giganti* to satisfy their lust in caves away from that divine image, thus creating the second practice of human existence, marriage. As distinct from the philosophic tradition, which considered choice free if governed by reason, "free" choice for Vico is determined solely by natural necessity and the impetus to satisfy common "needs and utilities".⁸⁸ Eventually the shared linguistic and social practices and physical labor created by these choices constitute a *sensus communis*, and it is only within a *sensus communis*, not on the basis of rational calculation, that individual choices realize social goals.

Language and the social practices of the human world made by that language remained concrete through the ages of gods and heroes, eventually creating the age of men. As with the first two, the construction of the third age was inseparable from language. The process began at the end of the heroic period when, in their great assemblies, the Athenians attempted to devise laws concerning the "intention"—that is, the rational utility—of law. These deliberations involved agreement on what is common to all, and from them Socrates began to "adumbrate intelligible . . . abstract universals by induction."⁸⁹ The age so created was characterized by the

⁸⁶ Ibid, 291, 379, 710–40.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 367.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 331–33, 340–41.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1038, 1040.

dominance of abstract rational thought, and the abstract “things” of the age included its science, jurisprudence, and philosophy.

Vico’s new science is poetic in the sense that its trues are not epistemic but rather are ontological. *Verum* is created as, and derived from, *factum*, the made things that constitute the certainties (*certa*) of the historical world. The *New Science* has rarely been understood as a poetic science. Insofar as *verum/factum* has been considered an epistemological principle, it has been assumed that Vico rejected Descartes’s conception of knowledge not to reject the possibility of epistemic knowledge but merely to replace a knowing of the natural world with a knowing of the historical.⁹⁰ In that reading, Vico’s third age, in which humans became rational knowers, becomes the *telos* of an essentially idealist historical process.

If, however, the *New Science* is a *poetic* science, then the historical process it traces must be understood not from its end but from its beginnings. Vico stresses the importance of his “genetic principles”: that “things do not settle or endure out of their natural state” and that “the nature of [things] is nothing but their coming into being at certain times and in certain guises.”⁹¹ That things can never be other than what they are *at their origins* is an ontological claim. Thus the humans of the third age were never *other* than poets. Similarly, knowledge can never be other than what it is at its origins. Vico distinguishes what rationalist philosophers call *knowledge* from the genetic knowing made possible by his new science, the knowing of philosopher-historians who derive the true from the certain. The knowing of philosopher-historians, which Vico calls *divination*, remains what it was at its origins. Just as the divination of the poets was the process of reading the concrete metaphors they had created and projected onto the sky, their hermeneutic interpretation of their poetic constructs, the knowing of philosopher-historians remains a hermeneutic interpretation of those poetic constructs.⁹² Philosopher-historians, however, know what the poets did not, that *what* humans know—their abstract sciences and philosophies—they themselves created.

The inability of rationalists to understand the genetic origins of their knowing is one source of what Vico calls *the barbarism of reflection*. Vico attributes that incapacity to their pedagogy. Based on algebra, the abstract logic of Artaud, Cartesian philosophy, and criticism, it forces children to

⁹⁰ Because of this epistemological bias, Vico is usually read as a precursor of idealist philosophies of history as well as of historicism and the social sciences.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 134, 147.

⁹² *Ibid.*

study abstractions at too early an age, neglecting languages, literature, history, rhetoric, and the art of topics, studies that nourish the bodily skills of perception, memory, and imagination. Without a humanist education, the rationalists cannot understand Vico's master key, the poetic nature of the first men; they cannot know themselves as poets descended from creators or know that what they know is that they create their knowledge.⁹³ Nor can they retain the imaginative ability to respond creatively to new needs and utilities in their social world. Without that ability, humans will inevitably descend into decadence, return to the forests and to the *ricorsi* of history.

Vico calls the *New Science* "a rational civil theology of divine providence" because it is a "history of the [things] by which, without human discernment or council, and often against the designs of men, providence has ordered this great city of the human race."⁹⁴ As it does for the progress theorists, Vico's "providence" functions in his civil theology to achieve social ends from choices made to satisfy individual "needs and utilities". If, however, *providence* is interpreted as either a transcendent agent or a Platonic pattern determining the *ricorsi* of the three ages, then Vico cannot construct a rational civil theology of divine Providence since humans would be neither creators nor knowers of history.⁹⁵

For many readers the *topos providence* seems too central to the *New Science* to be wholly immanent. The key to understanding its immanence lies in the genealogy Vico gives to the word *providence*. The theological poets, he says, created Jove as a "divine character" or imaginative universal. The term *divinity* was applied to *providence* because the study of the workings of providence was *divinare*, the power of divining—that is, the power to understand "what is hidden from men—the future—or what is hidden in them, their consciousness." Divination, the wisdom of the gentiles, took place in the practice of the auguries, giving the fathers a "knowledge of natural divine things." For this reason they were called "divine in the sense of *divinare*[,] . . . to divine or predict."⁹⁶ That Vico identifies "divination" as the power of divining what is hidden from men—in the future or in their consciousness—tells his readers that what is "providential" is the choices humans make, hidden from men not only because they are not consciously intended but also because they are "hidden" in a "communal," not

⁹³ Vico, *Autobiography*, pp. 123–25.

⁹⁴ Vico, *New Science*, 342.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 331–33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 338–45, 364–65, 381.

individual, sense of what satisfies human “needs and utilities”. Thus Vico’s new science is a demonstration of what Providence has wrought in history “by means as easy as the natural customs of men.” There is no more sublime proof of providential guidance than the “naturalness” of its means, Vico says, and he claims this knowledge enables his reader to “experience in his mortal body a divine pleasure as he contemplates . . . this world of nations.”⁹⁷

In coming to understand his master key, that the first men were poets, Vico has understood the significance of the creation of Jove in the first age: that it enabled the theological poets to make sense of a natural world they could never know. That creative act attributed meaning, purpose—*mind*—to nature in the only way the poets could do so, with a poetic image. Their divining of the language of that God in the practice of the auspices was the beginning of human knowing, and the knowing of philosopher-historians genetically derived from it is nothing other than the divining of the creation of the concrete human world in the historical development of its languages, social practices, and physical labor. Similarly, just as the poets made the natural world meaningful for themselves by creating Jove, Vico creates his own ironic metaphor of divine Providence to performatively tell his readers that he, as a philosopher-historian genetically descended from the first men, knows that he too is a creator, creating a “true fable” about the historical making of human truths—that he knows that the human “mind” that makes the historical world traced in the *New Science* is nothing other than the same inventive, imaginative, metaphoric language that created the first image of Jove and with it, the human world.

In interpreting Vico’s *verum/factum* as the secularization of the divine unity of knowing and making, Habermas criticizes Vico for not grasping the prospective and critical potential of that unity. Yet what enabled writers from the progressivists to Marx to justify their prospective view of history was not the secularization of the theological notion of a making unconditioned by knowing, but, rather, philosophy’s deification of a reason that structured historical as well as physical processes, the knowledge of which could guide human praxis. Only Habermas’s traditional onto-theological understanding of divine unity leads him to see *verum/factum* as an epistemological rather than an ontological principle. It also makes it impossible for him and other readers of Vico to appreciate the sense in

⁹⁷ Ibid., 309, 338–45, 364–65.

which Vico's usage is a secularization of a *theological* conception, one that understands the creative process as linguistic.

In identifying reason with the divine order of the cosmos, philosophy privileged language governed by rational, logical, or methodical thinking. Similarly it devalued the language of poets, rhetors, and sophists as the source of opinion, persuasion, and error. But Vico, who understands that the human world was created by prehuman beings with a creative, metaphoric language, knowingly identifies that language with the creative word in Genesis, *Davar*, which he says is the unity of logos (word), deed, and thing. Where Bacon and the progress theorists give humans the demi-urgic, rationalistic agency of the Divine Architect, Vico gives them something more divine-like: the power to create, as God had done, a concretely meaningful human world that had not been given to them in nature.

But Vico does so with a tragic sense the optimistic rationalists of his age disdained.⁹⁸ He knows that an infinitely progressive future is not possible for finite beings. He also knows that their divine creativity cannot save them from their own final creation, the abstract language and sciences that deceive them into believing themselves in control of their future.⁹⁹ For him, a more appropriate pattern for the course of human existence is the infinitely recurring, cyclical efforts to create a benign human world, always with the hope—evident only in Vico's emphasis on a humanistic education that nourishes the imaginative skills feeding the *sensus communis*—of resisting the dominance of an artifactual rationalism.

⁹⁸ The progressivists were actually disdainful of the skepticism in the period. Where Vico's *verum/factum* is certainly skeptical of the possibility of the kind of knowledge they thought insured progress, the tone of the *New Science* is, I believe, more tragic than skeptical.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 401. It is ironic that Vico identifies divine creativity with language, which the philosophic tradition on which Voltaire, Turgot, and Condorcet drew devalued as corrupting the clarity of rational ideas. Even Bacon, despite his debt to the theological tradition, shared philosophy's horror at the insidious power of language to corrupt reason.

13. PHILHELLENISM AMONG THE *PHILOSOPHES*: ANCIENT GREECE IN FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Sophie Bourgault

There are many ancient histories; but there are none in which one can perceive that philosophical spirit that distinguishes the true from the false, the incredible from the likely, and that sacrifices the useless.

—Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*¹

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest amongst *dix-huitièmistes* regarding antiquity's influence on Enlightenment thought. Scholars such as Dan Edelstein, Larry F. Norman, Chantal Grell and Caroline Winterer (to name but a few) have all assessed the degree to which the Ancients heavily informed the battles that took place in the long 18th century over philosophy, literature, art and politics.² Edelstein, for instance, boldly proposes that the origins of the European Enlightenment were chiefly located in the French Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns—most notably in the writings of abbé Dubos, Anne Dacier, Fontenelle and Perrault. Also emphasizing the enormous role played by the Quarrel over subsequent political and philosophical developments, Norman argues that ancient texts were not solely the object of profound admiration, but also a source of “scandal” that had a great impact on European intellectual history. Given all this, one could argue that the claim that antiquity mattered to the Enlightenment hardly calls for extensive justification anymore. Few would disagree with Peter Gay's assertion that ancient examples were of central importance to the *philosophes*: “they appealed to the ancients not merely for entertainment but for models,

¹ Voltaire *Oeuvres historiques*, René Pomeau ed. (Paris, 1957), p. 1200. My italics. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

² Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2010); Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France* (Chicago, 2011); Chantal Grell, *Le dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France* (Oxford, 1995). While not dealing directly with European debates, Winterer provides a fascinating account of how 18th & 19th century American female readers emulated ancient examples (particularly Spartan and Roman ones) in their public and private lives. *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition 1750–1900* (Ithaca, 2007). See also Joan DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns* (Chicago, 1997).

not merely for decoration but for substance... for all philosophes alike, the ancients were signposts to secularism.”³ For Gay, and for many scholars interested in Antiquity’s influence on Enlightenment thought,⁴ it is Rome—its history, institutions, heroes and philosophy—that the French 18th century cherished above all, and this near-consensus among scholars has, naturally, had the consequence of overshadowing the importance of ancient Greece for the French Enlightenment. It may be worth underscoring here that the *philosophes*’ preference for Rome rather than Greece was not chiefly the result of careful reflection. In many cases, it seems to have been the outcome of a set of particular circumstances: first, most *gens de lettres* were much more comfortable in Latin than in ancient Greek (few in fact had any Greek).⁵ Second, Rome had the advantage of being temporally closer to modern France than Greece—and as such, was often said to be ‘modern’ (a claim that could not be sustained with regards to Greece). And finally, the predominance of Rome is tied to the fact that a few of Rome’s institutions were said to have left significant imprints on modern Europe. As Voltaire noted in his *Encyclopédie* article ‘Histoire’: “The history of the Roman empire is that which *most merits our attention*, for the Romans were our masters and our legislators. Their laws are still in force in most of our provinces: their language is still spoken...”⁶

Solely on the basis of the number of pages penned on the respective time periods, there is no doubt that Rome occupied a more prominent place in the 18th century than Greece did.⁷ Edelstein’s observation that “most students in eighteenth-century France knew Roman history better than their own”⁸ would not apply equally to *Greek* history. But what I would like to show in this chapter is that Greece was also extremely significant for the French Enlightenment and its historiography. Indeed, it is ancient Greek history that stimulated some of the most acrimonious and revealing exchanges regarding the value of history and the ways of doing history. Moreover, I will show that it is *Sparta*’s history that got caught

³ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1 (New York, 1968), p. 44.

⁴ For a very recent and insightful discussion of the importance of Rome, see Edward G. Andrew, *Imperial Republics: Revolution, War and Territorial Expansion from the English Civil War to the French Revolution* (Toronto, 2011).

⁵ E.g. Chantal Grell, *Le dix-huitième*; Jennifer T. Roberts, *Athens on Trial. The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Princeton, 1994), p. 157. (Hereafter cited as Roberts)

⁶ Voltaire, ‘Histoire’, *L’Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, eds. Denis Diderot & Jean le Rond D’Alembert (1765), 8: 223. My italics.

⁷ But the same thing could be said for all centuries. As Roberts notes (p. 157), there is not a single century in which Greece was more important than Rome.

⁸ See Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy*, p. 55.

most severely in the crossfire between the *érudits* and the *philosophes*—whose intense battle has been recounted with great exegetical care by Chantal Grell.⁹ And it is also Sparta that led so many *philosophes* to state boldly their positions regarding the merits of luxury, frugality and commerce. In short, the stakes were high in 18th century discussions over Greek history, with many *philosophes* fervently discussing the following questions: could ancient history be a means to ‘Enlightenment’, or should it rather be seen as an obstacle to it? Could ancient Greek history be written and deployed to advance the cause of virtue, happiness and even peace—and if so, how? And whose history could serve such noble purposes: the history of the Lacedaemonians or that of the Athenians—or both? We will see below that Rousseau and Mably played significant roles in building up a cult of Sparta in France around the mid-18th century. But this sudden and very intense laconism (which was by no means universal) turned out to be fairly short-lived: as will be explained below, figures like Voltaire, Cornelius de Pauw and Mathon de la Cour quickly called into question the value of this enthusiastic deployment of Lacedaemonian history and moral examples. For many 18th century critics of laconism, to be on the side of Sparta often meant that one was against progress and Enlightenment.

Before turning to the *philosophes*’ writings however, we will first take a brief detour through the work of Charles Rollin (1661–1741), whose *Histoire ancienne* brought new energy to the study of ancient Greece in France. Such energy was badly needed, since the value and reliability of ancient and religious history had been called into question by 17th century historical pyrrhonism. So let us first see, then, what role Rollin played in French historiographical battles.

*Voltaire against Rollin, “ce prolix et inutile compilateur”*¹⁰

In the *Eloge de Rollin* he offered to the Académie française in 1818, Albin de Berville noted that Charles Rollin had made substantive contributions to the advancement of history. Professor of rhetoric and rector of the Université de Paris, Rollin had made a name for himself all over Europe by

⁹ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, and *L’histoire entre érudition et philosophie. Étude sur la connaissance historique à l’âge des lumières* (Paris, 1993).

¹⁰ Voltaire, *Lettre à Helvétius*, 24 mars 1740, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Fume, 1837), vol. 11.

publishing the very lengthy *Histoire ancienne*¹¹ (1730–38) and the *Traité des études*. For Berville, it was obvious that Rollin's work would be appreciated by posterity—his glory would be immortal.¹² Berville was, naturally, completely wrong: Rollin is now a name that has nearly been forgotten, save by the rare student of the Enlightenment who likes to remind us that “whole generations were brought up”¹³ on Rollin's thirteen-volume *Histoire ancienne*, which had a significant impact on 18th century historiographical debates.¹⁴

If Rollin's glory did not survive the 19th century, it is nevertheless manifest that he helped spark a rediscovery of Greek antiquity¹⁵ in France in the 1740s. The *érudit* Rollin was the first to provide a detailed account of Greek history in French, thus making it more readily accessible to the *philosophes*. Certainly, prior to Rollin, the *philosophes* could go to sources like Plutarch's *Lives* (and they massively did); but few other ‘primary’ sources or scholarly studies were available to them in French. In fact, until Rollin, Greek history (unlike Roman history) was mostly regarded as the preserve of the specialists or the *érudits*¹⁶—a fact that turned out to have important consequences for some of the debates that took place in the mid-18th century (the ‘modern’ fans of progress would often side with Rome and against Greece on the basis of that association between Greece and dry erudition).¹⁷

More significantly, Rollin's *Histoire ancienne* was peppered with outbursts of laconism¹⁸—which soon enough inspired countless readers (most notably Rousseau). Until the mid-18th century, few French works

¹¹ The full title is *Histoire ancienne des Egyptiens, des Carthaginois, des Assyriens, des Babyloniens, des Mèdes et des Perses, des Macédoniens, des Grecs* (Estienne, 1734). (Hereafter *Histoire ancienne*.) For details about Rollin, see the introduction to *Discours Préliminaire du Traité des Études* (Paris, 1998).

¹² “Eloge de Rollin”, dans *Oeuvres complètes de Rollin*, A. Lenoir & E. Bères eds., vol. 7 (Chainerot, 1845).

¹³ Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition* (Oxford, 1969), p. 222. (Hereafter cited as Rawson) Winterer also notes that Rollin's history was a particularly popular read amongst privileged American women in the 18th century. See her *The Mirror of Antiquity*, pp. 26–36.

¹⁴ Rollin's *Histoire ancienne* was also widely pillaged by English historians. See Roberts, p. 139. Rollin would not have been offended by this. In the preface to his *Histoire ancienne*, he himself wrote: “je ne me fais point un scrupule ni une honte de piller partout, souvent même sans citer les Auteurs que je copie.”

¹⁵ E.g. Roberts, ch. 8; Grell, *L'histoire entre l'érudition*, part III.

¹⁶ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 449.

¹⁷ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 431.

¹⁸ See for instance M. Legagneux, “Rollin et le ‘mirage spartiate’ de l'éducation spartiate,” *Recherches nouvelles sur quelques écrivains des Lumières*, J. Proust ed. (Geneva, 1972).

had celebrated Sparta at great length.¹⁹ The entry 'Lycurgus' in Bayle's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* could be cited as a case in point: putting aside the brief compliment Bayle pays to Lycurgus' sumptuary laws, the rest of the entry is critical and, what is more, the bulk of his lengthy notes are devoted to a disparaging discussion of Spartan women's sexual mores.²⁰ But references to Sparta would become more frequent and laudatory starting in the 1740s, in part thanks to Rollin's sympathetic and detailed account of Lycurgus' laws—which Rollin credited for having created "the most excellent republic that has ever existed."²¹ Sparta's stable mixed government, its grave concern for education, and its measures against luxury and inequality were all worthy of admiration in his view.²² Repeatedly, Rollin suggested that the main 'lesson' taught by ancient history was precisely this: that greed and material luxury are the most serious obstacles to political stability and happiness.²³

To associate luxury and material inequality with corruption (and to see Sparta as a unique site of frugality and virtue) was obviously not new: many civic republicans had done so centuries prior to the 18th century. But what is important to stress here is that before Rollin few people *in France* had insisted at length on the model provided by Sparta. Grell suggests that we can credit Rollin for having put ancient Sparta back on the intellectual map of France and more specifically, for having initiated a renewed interest in Greek political and economic institutions.²⁴ Up to that point, French writers had mostly focused on the deeds and virtue of a few great characters and heroes (following closely here in the footsteps of Plutarch and in the mirror of princes tradition).²⁵ According to Grell, this humanistic tradition underwent a crisis in the late 17th century in France, with historians increasingly turning from princes to peoples, from morality to institutions, and from erudition to philosophy.²⁶ In the following pages, we will try to nuance part of Grell's claim a bit for, as we

¹⁹ Rawson, ch. 15.

²⁰ Bayle, 'Lycurgue', *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, ed. Des Maizeaux (5è éd., t.3). Cf. 'Périclès'.

²¹ Rollin, *Histoire ancienne*, vol. I, p. 419.

²² By no means did Rollin express the exuberant and uncritical laconism of a Mably or a Rousseau however. His account of Sparta includes a long list of "les choses blamables dans les Loix de Lycurgue"—which include Sparta's treatment of the Helots and the 'indecent' behavior of its women. *Histoire ancienne*, vol. I, pp. 431–33.

²³ Rollin, *Traité des études*, pp. 81–82; *Histoire ancienne*, vol. I, pp. 427–431.

²⁴ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, pp. 449–56.

²⁵ Grell, *L'histoire entre érudition*, ch. 6.

²⁶ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 453.

will see, many Enlightenment *philosophes* (even those *most* critical of the obsession with antiquity) held on to the old 'humanist' claims that history is to be envisioned as "une école de *morale*"—including, if not exclusively, for those in power (i.e. for princes).

If Rollin was widely read and commonly referred to as 'le bon Rollin' (e.g. by Rousseau and Gibbon),²⁷ he was certainly not without his critics. Among the loudest of them was Voltaire, who had—like so many *gens de lettres* of his generation—read large parts of Rollin's work (not only the *Histoire ancienne*, but also the *Traité des études*). This encounter turned out to be fruitful for Voltaire's intellectual development: according to Magdy Gabriel Badir, it is largely Rollin's work that sparked Voltaire's early historiographical writings—it is Charles Rollin's limitations and failures as a historian that spurred Voltaire on.²⁸ While it might overstate the case for Rollin's influence on Voltaire,²⁹ this interpretation is at least supported by Voltaire's *Remarques sur l'histoire* (1742). This short historiographical piece could be summarized as a sustained critique of Rollin³⁰ and of all Rollin stood for according to Voltaire: gullible love of antiquity and 'compilation inutile'. The term 'compilateur' was deployed by countless literati in the mid-18th century, and (almost) never as a compliment: in his "Réflexions sur l'histoire", D'Alembert rails against the "tristes compilateurs" who usurp the name of historian. So too does Fontenelle in his *Sur l'histoire*.³¹ But if the label 'compilateur' was mostly used in a derogatory fashion by the *philosophes* at the time, the modest Rollin tried to (re)appropriate the label and give it some dignity. "I would be quite pleased & would consider myself very happy," he writes in the *Histoire*

²⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, livre II (Paris, 1966), p. 158. Gibbon, "Sur la monarchie des Medes", *The miscellaneous works of Edward Gibbon: with memoirs of his life*, vol. 3 (London, 1814), p. 132. An 18th century observer noted: "La postérité a mieux aimé dire le bon Rollin, comme elle dit le bon Henri au lieu de Henri-le-Grand." (H. Patin, 'Charles Rollin, né le 30 janvier 1661, mort le 14 septembre 1741', available online.)

²⁸ Badir, "Humanité et philosophie de l'histoire. Le discours historique chez Bossuet, Rollin et Voltaire", *Pratiques et concepts de l'histoire en Europe XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles*, C. Grell & J.-M. Dufays eds. (Paris, 1990), p. 149.

²⁹ Naturally, other historians influenced Voltaire. For details, see J.H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford, 1970) & Siofra Pierse, *Voltaire historiographer: narrative paradigms* (Oxford, 2008).

³⁰ For the specific passages of Rollin that Voltaire has in mind as he rails against the *compilateur*, see the notes of Pomeau in Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*.

³¹ D'Alembert, "Réflexions sur l'histoire et sur les différentes manières de l'écrire", *Oeuvres de D'Alembert*, t.II, 1^{ère} partie (Paris, 1821). Fontenelle, *Du bonheur. Suivi d'Aphorismes et de l'Essai sur l'histoire* (Paris, 1926).

ancienne, “if I could be a good compiler & provide a passable history to my readers.”³²

The criticisms of Rollin in Voltaire’s *Remarques sur l’histoire* (and elsewhere) are fairly predictable ones: Rollin uses his memory instead of his reason; his work is overly filled with rhetoric and unnecessary details; and last but not least, Rollin indulges in a naive recounting of ancient fables, barely reflecting on the reasonableness of the facts and numbers he provides. Indeed, Voltaire claims, Rollin’s *Histoire ancienne* is filled with many erroneous calculations—errors which Voltaire gleefully underscores.³³ For *le philosophe de Ferney*, it is hardly surprising that Rollin makes such obvious mistakes: “If one wanted to make use of one’s reason rather than one’s memory, and to examine rather than to transcribe, one would not multiply infinitely the number of books and errors . . . What is generally missing among those who compile history is the philosophical spirit: most historians, instead of discussing facts with men, produce tales for children.”³⁴

The war waged by Voltaire against the “inutiles compilateurs” of ancient gibberish is fought not only in the *Remarques sur l’histoire* and *Nouvelles considérations sur l’histoire*, but also in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* and the *Essai sur les mœurs*. In his entry ‘Système’, for instance, Voltaire argues that the ‘compilateurs’ are not only bores and pedants, they also tend to be the enemies of progress and the enemies of their times (a claim also embraced by D’Alembert in his historiographical writings,³⁵ albeit with more subtlety). Voltaire writes:

There are always *little compilers who dare to be the enemies of their century*: they pile up passages from Plutarch . . . in order to prove to us that we owe nothing to the Newtons, the Halleys, the Bradleys . . . They pretend that the ancients have said everything already and they have the imbecility to believe that they share in the glory of the ancients because they publish it.³⁶

As we will see below, however, Voltaire saved his ‘modern’ venom for Sparta-lovers only: those who cheered for Athens and its history were

³² Rollin, *Histoire ancienne*, vol. I, p. xix.

³³ E.g. Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 42.

³⁴ Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 42.

³⁵ See his *Discours Préliminaire*, introduction by A. Pons (Paris, 1986), p. 134 & pp. 126–127, where D’Alembert describes as follows the blind worshipping of the ancients since the renaissance: “on dévora sans distinction tout ce que les anciens nous avaient laissé dans chaque genre; on les traduisit, on les commenta; et, par une espèce de reconnaissance on se mit à les adorer, sans connaître à beaucoup près ce qu’ils valaient.”

³⁶ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. ‘Système’, dans *Œuvres Complètes* (hereafter OC), Louis Moland éd., vol. 20 (Paris: 1967), p. 471. My italics.

generally on the side of progress and modernity in his view and as such, did not deserve to become the targets of his ire.³⁷

Now, it may be tempting to gather from this that Voltaire basically counseled his contemporaries to set aside ancient history. After all, so many of his criticisms of Rollin and of ancient historians (e.g. Herodotus, Plutarch, Xenophon) are totalizing and unforgiving.³⁸ If one of the key principles of Voltaire's historical methodology is that one must do history 'en philosophe', this principle had never been applied, according to Voltaire, by *any* historian of antiquity. In his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, he writes boldly: "there are many ancient histories; but there are none in which one can perceive that philosophical spirit that distinguishes the true from the false..."³⁹ Voltaire also frequently asserts that useful history begins with modernity—more specifically, with the invention of printing. Good history requires (at best) numerous live witnesses, but if these have all departed, good paper trails, archives and 'monuments' will do. It is partially on the basis of this that he counsels his readers to stay away from ancient history:

It seems to me that if we want to profit from the present time, we will not pass our lives infatuated by ancient fables. I would counsel a young man to have a slight tincture of ancient times; but I would want one to begin a serious study of history at the point in time when it becomes truly interesting to us: it seems to me that this time is around the end of the 15th century.⁴⁰

And yet, despite all this, Voltaire does not entirely reject the value of Greek history. As Síoira Pierse and Michèle Mat-Hasquin have both shown,⁴¹ Voltaire resorts to ancient models and histories not only as means to sharpen his own conception of the task and methodology of the historian, but also as weapons in his war for toleration (his well-known appeal to Athenian religious tolerance is a perfect illustration of this).⁴² Naturally, Voltaire's deployment of Ancient examples was exceedingly selective: while he

³⁷ "Le tems est si cher, & l'*histoire* est si immense, qu'il faut épargner aux lecteurs de telles fables & de telles moralités". 'Histoire', *Encyclopédie*, 8: 222. Also Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 46.

³⁸ In his *Encyclopédie* article 'Histoire', Voltaire also disparages Rollin for his uncritical copying of Herodotus, and for wasting everyone's time with his accounts of implausible oracles and myths.

³⁹ Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 1200.

⁴⁰ Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, pp. 43–44.

⁴¹ Mat-Hasquin, *Voltaire et l'antiquité grecque* (Oxford, 1981); Pierse, *Voltaire Historiographer*, ch. 6.

⁴² E.g. Voltaire, *Philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris-Genève, 1996), p. 150.

quickly dismissed most of Sparta's legends and history, he often presented Athens' own stories as obvious 'truths'.

While Rollin served as a spur to Voltaire's historiographical reflection, this does not mean, however, that Voltaire's assessment of Rollin's work was entirely fair. In particular, Voltaire erred when he refused to appreciate the differences between the type of historical work proposed by Bossuet and by Rollin, seeing in both a statement against modernity and against progress. While a few students of the Enlightenment today still lump Bossuet and Rollin together and insist on regarding ancient histories like Rollin's as regrettable obstacles to the deployment of good scientific history (Peter Gay is a case in point),⁴³ others have (correctly) tried to nuance both claims.⁴⁴ Putting aside the very Christian preface (where Rollin defends himself against the charge of being too sympathetic to paganism), providentialism does not loom very large in Rollin's narrative; history has taken some distance from theology. Moreover, it was no doubt a little unfair on Voltaire's part to summarize sardonically Rollin's entire oeuvre as mere 'compilation'. Rollin frequently noted that a mere stimulation of our memory was insufficient; reflection mattered: "Nothing is more useful than knowledge of history. But if one contents oneself with loading up one's memory with an infinitude of facts . . . one will know very little."⁴⁵ The same thing could have been written by a Voltaire, a Montesquieu or a D'Alembert. The latter observed, in his *Discours Préliminaire*, that uncritical compilation was pointless; but contrary to Voltaire, D'Alembert was not interested in adding fuel to the burning contempt of some *philosophes* for the *érudits*. More conciliatory, D'Alembert called upon both camps to show a greater appreciation towards each other's (arguably different) work. (There is an interesting tension, however, between D'Alembert's desire to see the *érudits* and the *philosophes* reconciled, and his insistent distinction in the *Discours Préliminaire* between three human faculties and the professional groups that exemplify them: memory (historians); reason (*philosophes*); imagination (*beaux-esprits*.) D'Alembert thought

⁴³ E.g. Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation. Vol. II. The Science of Freedom*, p. 373; also Badir, 'Humanité et philosophie'. Mat-Hasquin seemingly shares part of Voltaire's opinion that ancient histories are an impediment to progress when she writes: "Faut-il s'étonner que [Voltaire] ait insisté, non sur les mérites des Grecs, mais sur leurs carences à une époque où un respect excessif pour l'antiquité freinait les progrès de l'histoire?", *Voltaire et l'antiquité*, p. 229. My italics.

⁴⁴ E.g. Grell, *L'histoire entre érudition*, p. 144; Jean Lombard, introduction to *Traité des études*.

⁴⁵ Rollin, *Traité des études*, p. 128.

that it would be an inane prejudice wholly to reject the contribution of the erudite historians of antiquity. He writes:

Philosophy, which forms the dominant taste of our century, appears, by the progress that it has made among us, to be attempting to make up for lost time and to avenge itself against our fathers for the contempt they showed it. This contempt has today fallen on erudition, and is no more just for having changed objects. We imagine that we have drawn from the ancients everything that it is important for us to know . . . but just as it would be ridiculous to believe that there is nothing left to discover in anatomy because anatomists sometimes devote themselves to apparently useless studies, . . . it would be no less absurd to want to banish erudition on the basis of the unimportant research to which our scholars abandon themselves. It is ignorant or presumptuous to believe that everything is known in any subject, and that we no longer have anything to learn from the study of the ancients.⁴⁶

If D'Alembert stopped short of praising Rollin here, he nevertheless recognized that works like the *Histoire ancienne* were a prerequisite for the Enlightenment to finally write history—and particularly *ancient* history—'en philosophe'.

Ancient History and Civic Happiness: Rousseau and Mably's Laconism

We noted in the previous section that it was pretty standard Enlightenment fare to call into question the value of erudite ancient history. Voltaire's challenge lacked the nuances and generosity of D'Alembert's—but, largely for that reason, provoked many philhellenists to respond. And indeed, the historical pyrrhonism of the likes of Voltaire and D'Alembert could simply not thwart what some have called a "resurrection" or "revival" of Sparta—a sudden and radical outburst of interest for Lacedaemonian mores, laws and history.⁴⁷ The "myth of Sparta"⁴⁸ (e.g. its miraculous founding, its exemplary virtue, its divine Lycurgus) was certainly not new: we can find early articulations of it in Plato, in Xenophon, in Plutarch and in some early modern civic humanists. But as we noted above, one would be hard-pressed to find equally strong expressions of laconism in 16th, 17th and early 18th century France. And yet, within roughly a decade or two, around 1750, French intellectual circles were swamped by an exuberant

⁴⁶ D'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire*, pp. 152–53.

⁴⁷ E.g. Rawson, ch. 15; Roberts, pp. 162–168; Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, pp. 456–460.

⁴⁸ E.g. R.A. Leigh, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Myth of Antiquity in the Eighteenth Century", in R.R. Bolgar ed., *Classical Influences on Western Thought* (Cambridge, 1979).

(albeit not universal) enthusiasm for Sparta. What prompted such a rapid turn of events? If I have suggested above that Rollin's *Histoire ancienne* had sown the seeds of this mid-18th century laconism, it is certainly Rousseau and Mably who made it bloom.⁴⁹

Elizabeth Rawson has argued that Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* was also an important catalyst for the 'rebirth' of Sparta.⁵⁰ While largely correct, this interpretation nevertheless calls for nuances. Certainly, Montesquieu speaks warmly of the equality and frugality found in Lacedaemonia,⁵¹ and his interpretation of Sparta's decline is overall sympathetic to the Spartans. One hotly disputed issue about Greek history was whether Sparta's decline (and, by implication, that of Greece) was Sparta's fault or whether Athens should be blamed above all. At stake here is what constitutes the most significant source of political corruption: riches (Athens), or excessively strict laws *against* riches (Sparta)? To this question, Montesquieu embraced the typical answer offered at the time: it is primarily *Athens* that is responsible for corrupting the mores of Sparta.⁵²

But Montesquieu's criticisms of Spartan institutions and ways are far too numerous to position him squarely in the club of Enlightenment laconophiles.⁵³ In addition to underscoring their "esprit belliqueux" and the arbitrariness of their administration of the law, Montesquieu criticizes Spartans for their terrible cruelty.⁵⁴ Last but not least, Montesquieu also notes that there was far too much gloom and austerity in the Spartan character (the Athenians' cheerful and loquacious manners were much closer to modern French ways).⁵⁵ To insist on Spartan sobriety and silence is perhaps not that strange or new. But we should note that there were a few rare Sparta devotees (e.g. Helvétius) who did manage to associate Lacedaemonia with gaiety, sensuous pleasures and even laughter.⁵⁶

If Montesquieu played a modest role in the 18th century 'rise of Sparta', Rousseau's influence cannot be underestimated. Rawson writes, "There

⁴⁹ Grell also stresses the role of the *Encyclopédie*, but insists that the main reason for "la résurrection du mythe spartiate" is Rousseau's first discourse. *Le dix-huitième*, p. 480 & p. 513.

⁵⁰ Rawson, p. 227. Cf. Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 513.

⁵¹ *De l'esprit des lois*, V: 3–5.

⁵² *De l'esprit des lois*, VIII: 16. See also Jaucourt's *Encyclopédie* art. 'Sparte ou Lacédémone'.

⁵³ Rawson herself acknowledges that later in her work (for instance on p. 229). On the subtleties of Montesquieu's position vis-à-vis the Ancient vs. Modern binary, see also Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy*, pp. 56–57.

⁵⁴ E.g. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, XIX: 16; VI: 3; XI: 19; XV: 16.

⁵⁵ Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, XIX: 7.

⁵⁶ See Rawson, ch. 16.

can be no doubt that any real laconomania existing in the later eighteenth century owed much of its strength to Rousseau. What he felt for Sparta was more than mere admiration; it was a deep emotional attachment.”⁵⁷ What we could add here is that this intense attachment stayed with him for his entire life. Indeed, while the old Rousseau came to question some of his youthful infatuations, he never repudiated his account of Spartan history and his eulogy of Lycurgus. These were most explicitly articulated in his *Discours sur les Sciences et les arts*,⁵⁸ which managed to spur both enthusiasm for Sparta amongst the literati and an equally strong *anti*-Sparta reaction. In the *Discours* (and even more so in the responses that Rousseau wrote to his subsequent critics), Sparta is hailed as a model of civic virtue, of frugality, of heroism—and it is contrasted polemically with the all-too-bourgeois Athens, eloquent, polite and vicious.⁵⁹ It may strike some as odd that a republican with such democratic sensibilities as Rousseau could not appreciate Athens much. But the oddness disappears if one recalls that few of Rousseau’s contemporaries questioned the age-old association between Athens, corruption and anarchy—as Jennifer Roberts has convincingly shown.⁶⁰

Rousseau found in Sparta what he thought he needed most to make a strong case against luxury and the arts. As he wrote to De Bordes, Sparta was the most potent ammunition he had against his detractors:

My adversaries are most visibly uncomfortable whenever one must speak of Sparta. What would they not give for this fatal Sparta never to have existed? and those who insist that grand actions are merely to be celebrated, what price would they pay for Sparta’s grand actions never to have been! It is a terrible thing that in the middle of this famous Greece, which owed its virtue solely to its philosophy, the state [*l’Etat*] in which virtue was the purest and lasted the longest was precisely the state in which there were no

⁵⁷ Rawson, p. 231. Roberts speaks of Rousseau as “the most flamboyant of a long line of laconophiles” in her *Athens on Trial*. See also Paul Cartledge, “Hellenism in the Enlightenment”; Yves Toucheffeu, *L’antiquité et le christianisme dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Oxford, 1999); D. Leduc-Fayette, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le mythe de l’antiquité* (Paris, 1974); R.A. Leigh, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Myth of Antiquity”; Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, pp. 465–470; Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, pp. 223–226.

⁵⁸ Other expressions of Rousseau’s laconism can be found in *Contrat Social* (II, III), *Gouvernement de Pologne* (ch. II); the *Lettre à d’Alembert*; the incomplete ‘Histoire de Lacédémone’; the ‘Parallèle entre les deux républiques de Sparte et de Rome’ (see Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III).

⁵⁹ On ‘bourgeois Athens’, see the authoritative discussion of Nicole Loraux & Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “La formation de l’Athènes bourgeoise: essai d’historiographie 1750–1850”, in P. Vidal-Naquet, *La démocratie grecque vue d’ailleurs* (Paris, 1990).

⁶⁰ Roberts, particularly ch. 8.

philosophers. The mores of Sparta were always proposed as an example to Greece; all of Greece was corrupt, and there was still virtue in Sparta.⁶¹

Rousseau was so infatuated with Sparta that he at some point decided to write its history, though he never brought this work to completion. The reasons for this incompleteness are ambiguous: interpreters can only guess what might have led Rousseau to abandon the project—a project he most likely undertook at someone's request during the heated exchanges that followed the publication of his prize-winning discourse.⁶² On the basis of the last issue raised by Rousseau at the end of this 'Histoire de Lacédémone', it is possible to speculate however. Right before the unfinished text comes to an end, Rousseau introduces the subject of the Helots, dropping it instantly. It is possible that Rousseau saw here too thorny an issue—one that could not be addressed properly without compromising his unwavering laconism.⁶³

Unlike many *philosophes*, Rousseau thought that ancient history (particularly that of Sparta and early republican Rome) was worthier of our attention than modern history; for one thing, ancient history is filled with more numerous heroic examples. If at times Rousseau notes that one ought to be careful with the "fables ridicules" of pre-Homeric Greece, he generally adopts a fairly generous (or naive, as a Voltaire would say) hermeneutic posture towards fables and legends. For Rousseau, ancient history (as uncertain as it is) could undeniably be a means to virtue and civic happiness.

But some might suggest that if with Rousseau we enter the land of flamboyant laconism, we also seem to leave behind the discipline of (good) history. According to a few students of the Enlightenment, Rousseau's Sparta seems to stand completely 'outside' of time⁶⁴—a claim with which Jean-Jacques himself would probably have felt comfortable. Didn't he suggest, at the beginning of his second discourse, that one should put all (historical) facts aside?⁶⁵ And didn't his perfect Sparta emerge suddenly and quasi-magically out of Lycurgus' hand and largely remained untouched by

⁶¹ Rousseau, "Dernière Réponse", in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 83.

⁶² See Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 1537.

⁶³ See 'Histoire de Lacédémone', *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 548. See also 'Parallèle entre Sparte et Rome', where Rousseau briefly mentions the issue of slavery. *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 540.

⁶⁴ Cf. Lionel Gossman, "Rousseau, Time and History", *SVEC*, XXX (1964).

⁶⁵ "Commençons donc par écarter tous les faits, car ils ne touchent point à la question." *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 132. Cf. Rousseau, 'Réponse au roi de Pologne'.

time? Another illustration of Rousseau's lack of concern for the demands of 'scientific' history can be found in *Emile*, where he comments on the *érudits'* concern with 'truth':

The ancient historians are filled with views that we could put to good use, *even if the facts they present are false*. But we do not know how to draw any advantage from history; erudite critique absorbs all: as if it were essential for a fact to be true for us to draw from it a useful institution. Sensible men should regard history as a tissue of fables whose morals are appropriate for the human heart.⁶⁶

We could suggest, then, that Rousseau's infatuation with ancient Sparta could do little to answer the challenges posed by historical pyrrhonism, and more specifically, to answer the challenge of Voltaire towards uncritical laconophiles. For Grell, Rousseau only made things worse, by reinforcing the associations between 'mythical' and ancient history. "Sparta does not belong to history", suggests Chantal Grell, "for Rousseau . . . it belongs to myth."⁶⁷

Grell is convinced that the same observation equally applies to Gabriel Bonnot de Mably's Sparta. She argues that in his oeuvre, one finds great ideological force and an evident love of Sparta, but, on the whole, only bad history: banal dichotomies between Athens and Sparta, excessive lyricism, and a heap of contradictions.⁶⁸ In her view (and it is a position partially shared by Mably scholar Jean-Louis Lecercle),⁶⁹ Mably is totally incapable of a 'cool' and critical distance when it comes to Spartan history and Lycurgus. As such, Grell might be said to embrace (at least in part) the thesis of Benjamin Constant, who famously argued in *De la liberté des anciens et des modernes* that Mably was guilty of having created an irresponsible cult of Sparta (one that culminated in the Terror).⁷⁰ Here is not the place to discuss the extent of Mably's responsibility for Jacobinism, however.⁷¹ I will, more modestly, concern myself with drawing out what

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *Émile ou De l'éducation*, OC IV, note p. 415. My italics.

⁶⁷ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 483 and p. 498. See also Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1969), especially ch. 1; R.A. Leigh, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Myth of Antiquity".

⁶⁸ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 473.

⁶⁹ Lecercle insists that this 'lack of objectivity' is limited to Mably's treatment of Sparta. "Utopie et réalisme politique chez Mably", *SVEC* vol. 26 (1963), p. 1059.

⁷⁰ Constant, *Écrits politiques* (Paris, 1997), especially p. 607.

⁷¹ On this issue (and Mably's political thought more generally), readers should consult Johnson Kent Wright, *A Classical Republican in 18th century France: The Political Thought of Mably* (Stanford, 1997); Keith Baker, "A Script for a French Revolution: The Political Consciousness of the abbé Mably", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 14:3 (1981); E. Harpaz, "Mably et

is particular about Mably's treatment of Sparta and about his perspective on the value of ancient history (my general aim here is to nuance slightly the interpretation proposed by Grell).

It is little known that roughly half of the pages penned by Mably during his life are devoted to the subject of history: its value, the way of writing and of studying it, etc.⁷² Indeed, very few scholars today study Mably's *De l'étude de l'histoire*, his *De la manière d'écrire l'histoire* and his *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*. That is regrettable, for, as Lecercle, Wright and Alocco-Bianco have all shown, these works are not a quaint but detachable 'appendage' to Mably's other main works (which deal with topics like economics, and public and international law).⁷³ The significance of ancient history for Mably is particularly manifest in his *De l'étude de l'histoire* (1778)—which is at once a historiographical essay and a discussion of the "grandes vérités" that define socio-political life. Mably embraced early on a conviction with which he never parted: history's value rests on *both* the ethical lessons it provides and the political knowledge it can transmit. And the value of studying the history of the Greeks and of the (early) Romans cannot be overestimated here. In the *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*, he writes:

the history of these two peoples is a great school of morality and politics; one does not merely see there just how high the virtues and the talents of men can be raised through the laws of a wise government; even their errors serve eternally as a source of lessons to men. *Would that princes*, in seeing the terrible fate due to the ambitions of Sparta & Athens, & of the divisions of Greece, *know & love their duty to society*.⁷⁴

We can see here that Mably embraces some of the tenets of the mirror of princes literature—albeit with a particular (democratic) twist.⁷⁵ Indeed, if

la postérité", in *Revue des sciences humaines* (juillet-sept. 1954). For another discussion of the connections to be drawn, more generally, between infatuation with the Ancients and the French Revolution, see Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment*.

⁷² Lecercle, "Utopie et réalisme politique", p. 1058.

⁷³ Luciana Alocco-Bianco, "L'abbé de Mably et sa conception de l'histoire", *L'histoire au XVIII^e siècle* (Aix-en-Provence, 1980); Wright, *A Classical Republican*; Lecercle, "Utopie et réalisme politique chez Mably", p. 1058. Lecercle writes: "L'étude de l'histoire a joué dans la formation de sa pensée un rôle essentiel. Elle lui a permis de généraliser son expérience de la vie et des affaires. Elle a enrichi et assoupli ce que son rationalisme avait d'abstrait."

⁷⁴ Mably, *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce* (Genève, 1766), p. v (my italics). See also *De l'étude de l'histoire & De la manière d'écrire l'histoire*, dans *Collection Complète des œuvres de l'Abbé de Mably*, tome 12 (Paris, 1794-95), p. 12 & p. 14.

⁷⁵ Many more 'democratic' aspects of Mably's account of (Greek) history could be highlighted here in this chapter. For instance, in *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*, Mably

Mably counsels all readers to go to Plutarch or Xenophon for role models, he nevertheless counsels his *princely* readers to take as their models not powerful leaders but rather, simple and virtuous citizens. It is from them, for instance, that the greatest love of justice and glory can be learned.⁷⁶

Filled with countless examples of successes and failures, ancient history can make up for our inexperience, give us prudence and hence help us avoid some of the miseries of our ancestors.⁷⁷ Mably is convinced that, when undertaken with patience and '*en philosophe*', history can free us from our prejudices: he suggests, for instance, that the history of ancient Persia might teach us to be wary of ambition and pride, whereas that of Rome gives us timely warnings about modern penchants for acquisition and injustice. In this list of the various epochs and peoples of antiquity (and their respective lessons), Sparta stands out: instead of providing us mostly with 'negative' lessons (i.e. need to avoid avarice, ambition, empire), Lacedaemonia gives us, above all, *positive* lessons. Whereas Athens provides readers with an account of various *vices*, Sparta provides us with countless examples of *virtue*.⁷⁸ While Mably acknowledges that modern history also offers useful lessons (most notably *la thèse germaniste*),⁷⁹ he still shares Rousseau's view that ancient history is of greater utility.⁸⁰ Quite significantly, Greece's remoteness does not seem to represent a problem for Mably (we saw that it posed one for Voltaire and D'Alembert); rarely do we see the abbé worry about the reliability of sources on which ancient history rests. This might be partially the result of Mably's fairly generous hermeneutic outlook on the issue of fables and superstition (to which we will return shortly).

Mably's enthusiasm for ancient history is largely tied to his conviction that its lessons are of eternal significance and that all those in positions of power are capable of understanding them. Behind human diversity rests a great deal of uniformity: "the same passions, the same mores, the same virtues, the same vices have always produced the same effects; the fate of states depends on fixed, immutable and certain principles. Discover these

notes the fact that most historians have unfairly blamed *le peuple* for civic conflicts and instability. See e.g. pp. 48–50.

⁷⁶ Mably, *De l'étude de l'histoire*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 381.

⁷⁸ Mably, *De l'étude de l'histoire*, particularly pp. 18–20.

⁷⁹ On this, see François Furet et Mona Ozouf, "Deux légitimations historiques de la société française au XVIII^e siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers", in *Annales. Économies. Sociétés Civilisations*, no. 3 (1979), 438–450.

⁸⁰ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 371.

principles . . . politics will no longer be mysterious to you.”⁸¹ Mably insists that fortune is not the engine of history;⁸² rather, history is moved by regular and uniform principles on the basis of which the historian might foresee some impending political and military events. “Knowledge of the past”, he optimistically tells his readers, “will lift the veil that hides the future from you”.⁸³

If Mably has much respect for ancient historians, he is—like most *philosophes*—no great fan of “*érudits*” and of “*insipides compilateurs*” either.⁸⁴ Many of Mably’s historical works are peppered with warnings to the effect that historical accounts are not there simply to be written, read and memorized. One should take a step back from particular events and reflect on their greater *causes* and significance:⁸⁵ “what use is erudition if it merely teaches me facts from which I can draw no *useful* instruction?”⁸⁶ Like countless other *philosophes*, Mably always insists that history ought to be useful, that it ought to be put in the service of the *present* (and he is convinced that ancient Greek history is perfectly fit for that task). We thus ought to be careful not to ascribe to Mably a historiographical position that is completely at odds with that of Voltaire, despite Mably’s recurring and hyperbolic attacks against *le philosophe de Ferney*.

In various works, Mably singles out Voltaire as an object of bitter criticism. Voltaire seems to have had on Mably the effect that Rollin had on Voltaire: he was a spur to the development of Mably’s approach to history and to the role of the historian. Behind the polemical excesses of many of his attacks against Voltaire, one can almost decipher something akin to a ‘philosophy of history’ (not understood here in the manner of a Hegel, but rather, of a Voltaire). One of the key principles of this Mablean ‘philosophy of history’ is that the good historian must be equipped with a solid knowledge of the human passions (which are, we saw, fairly constant throughout history in his view). It is this knowledge that lends constancy and coherence to a historian’s pronouncements—and it is a knowledge that Voltaire the historian lacks:

Take away from a historian his knowledge of the passions, and his political thought will thenceforth be uncertain and unsteady . . . In one chapter

⁸¹ Mably, *De l’étude de l’histoire*, p. 20.

⁸² Mably, *De l’étude de l’histoire*, p. 17. “La fortune n’est rien, la sagesse tout.”

⁸³ Mably, *De l’étude de l’histoire*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 370.

⁸⁵ E.g. Mably, *De la manière*, p. 386; *De l’étude de l’histoire*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 444. My italics.

he will be Machiavellian, in another he will praise keeping faith. A zealous partisan of luxury, he will mock governments that make sumptuary laws; yet elsewhere, he will tell you that the Swiss were ignorant of the sciences and arts that luxury had allowed, but that they were wise and happy . . . One will find in his work but half-truths that are equally erroneous. . . . This is, if I may say in passing, the universal history of Voltaire.⁸⁷

Voltaire's inconstancy raises Mably's ire particularly because Mably regards these vacillations as symptomatic of a wider and regrettable severing of politics and morality. For the abbé, one should never analyze historical events without keeping in mind the need for ethical lessons; and for Mably, it is Voltaire's failure to keep that imperative in mind that lead him to defend Athens over Sparta and to have such a poor interpretation of Athenian history. Having a "mauvaise politique" and a "mauvaise morale", Voltaire was bound to be a bad historian.⁸⁸

We saw above that Voltaire believed that the partisans of Sparta were almost always the enemies of happiness and progress. Mably turns the charge around: it is the partisans of Athens who tend to work against 'les lumières' and the happiness of humankind. Part of the reason for this is that these partisans often attend more to the 'head' (*l'esprit*) than to the heart. Histories like Voltaire's—histories that seek above all to 'train the head' (rather than the heart) or to make readers laugh—are of dubious utility: "I want the historian to have the most profound respect for mores; let him teach me to love the public good, the *patrie*, justice; let him unmask vice in order to make us honour virtue."⁸⁹ This teaching of a passionate *amour de la patrie* ought to be done in a subtle manner however: good history should not contain obvious moral propaganda. The historian must give moral lessons to his readers *without in fact doing so* (needless to say, Mably often failed to apply this rule to his own work.): "I want the historian to be in a position to write a treatise on morality, on politics, and on natural right, *but I do not want him to do so*: let him content himself with furnishing the materials for an intelligent reader."⁹⁰ If a historical text is to provide the grounds for an increased prudence and judgment, much must be left for the reader to do. (What Mably failed to appreciate is that Voltaire basically wrote the same thing in his entry 'Histoire' for *L'Encyclopédie*.)

⁸⁷ Mably, *De la manière*, pp. 395–96.

⁸⁸ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 396.

⁸⁹ Mably, *De la manière*, pp. 397–98.

⁹⁰ Mably, *De la manière*, pp. 388–389. My italics.

Voltaire is thus censured for his limited knowledge of the passions, for being on the 'wrong' side of the fence for ancient history (i.e. being pro-Athens) and also, for soiling ancient histories with too much wit and irony. The humourless Mably is convinced that history is far too important a discipline to be a suitable home for wit and derision. "History must never permit buffoonery . . . it is barbaric and scandalous to laugh and to make jokes about the errors that affect the happiness of men."⁹¹ We know fairly little about the life and personality of Mably, but we could surmise that this attack against humor in history might be linked to Mably's personal antipathy for *le philosophe de Ferney*. But Mably's critique rests on something more substantive than a mere *ad hominem* attack. It is also tied to a greater respect for fables and myths (and for the masses who believed in them): the abbé repeatedly insists that little is accomplished by mocking the rites and superstitions of ancient peoples, or by deriding the ancient historians who have recounted them. In any case, Mably suggests that these historians probably did not believe in most of the religious sacrifices and superstitions they recounted: "I assure you that Titus Livy was not superstitious. If he had believed in the prodigies that he reported he would have spoken in a different tone: but he did not make fun of them like our philosophers."⁹² But if Mably objects to Voltaire's scorn and wit, he agrees with him on one thing: fables and superstition should, as much as possible, stay out of history books—since, while entertaining, these do not fully please our reason. History must be done 'en philosophe'.⁹³ "I read with pleasure in Homer and in Virgil that Achilles and Aeneas receive from heaven arms fabricated by Vulcan, but I want a historian to teach me that great men and states need no other shield than their talents and the wisdom of their laws."⁹⁴

History for Mably is thus a school of ethical and political wisdom; it is a solemn discipline that requires much philosophy, and the laws and truths it reveals are of universal significance. If ancient Rome and ancient Persia certainly do participate in this revealing of universal truths, it is Sparta that has the greatest lessons to offer according to Mably. In the *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*, we learn that Sparta is a model of stability, discipline and harmony; its shunning of the arts, of commerce and money is to be admired, and so is its mixed regime. Mably's Sparta

⁹¹ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 396; also p. 435.

⁹² Mably, *De la manière*, pp. 405–406.

⁹³ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 400.

⁹⁴ Mably, *De la manière*, p. 404.

is “without splendor and without luxury, & it is inhabited by citizen soldiers who love only justice, glory, their liberty and their *patrie*.”⁹⁵ This eulogy is, no doubt, reminiscent of Plutarch’s and of several earlier laconophiles, but it would be incorrect to see Mably’s work solely as a collage of unoriginal pro-Sparta observations and of banal dichotomies as some have suggested.⁹⁶ In at least three respects, Mably’s interpretation of Lacedaemonian history could be said to be fairly unusual. First, his *Observations sur l’histoire de la Grèce* makes the case that the corruption of Sparta started much sooner than most historians had typically argued.⁹⁷ Whereas many associated the beginning of corruption with Lysander, Mably claims that Sparta was already lost the day it won against the Persians and thus, that fifth century Sparta is unworthy of admiration.⁹⁸ To inscribe the fall of Sparta so early on in time helps Mably underscore one of his central historical insights: that all success and prosperity contain the seeds of their own destruction—success breeds corruption. As he writes in *De l’étude de l’histoire*: “an excessive prosperity is an insupportable burden.”⁹⁹

Secondly, Mably’s account of Sparta is fairly unique in that it puts unprecedented emphasis on the pacific nature of the Lacedaemonians.¹⁰⁰ In Rousseau and Montesquieu (just as in Aristotle’s *Politics*), Sparta was said to be defined above all by war and by military virtue. Montesquieu often underscored Spartans’ ‘esprit belliqueux’ and proposed a stark contrast (picked up by several during the 18th century) between the *commercial* republic of Athens and the *military* republic of Sparta.¹⁰¹ “While all states have, in general, the same purpose, which is to maintain themselves”, writes Montesquieu, “every state also has a purpose which is particular to it. Aggrandisement was the object of Rome; war, that of Lacedaemonia.”¹⁰² What is unusual about Mably’s treatment of Sparta and Athens is that he almost completely overturns this: it is Athens that is bellicose; it is Athens that is obsessed with expansion and war. And it is the Spartans who embrace *peace* as their highest good: “everything invited

⁹⁵ Mably, *Observations*, p. 37.

⁹⁶ Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, pp. 473–78.

⁹⁷ See Rawson, pp. 248–249.

⁹⁸ E.g. *Observations*, p. 68; pp. 81–82.

⁹⁹ *De l’étude de l’histoire*, p. 81. It is for this reason, he insists, that politics should aim at “mediocrity”—i.e. moderation, simplicity.

¹⁰⁰ This is a part of Mably’s reading of ancient history that Wright regards as particularly significant. See his *A Classical Republican*, ch. 3.

¹⁰¹ Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, XIX: 16; also V: 5 & 6.

¹⁰² Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, XI: 5.

them...to regard peace as the most precious good for men.”¹⁰³ Mably, naturally, could not entirely deny the importance of military discipline and of the “soldierly” ethos in Sparta. But he constantly puts these under the umbrella of ‘peace’: at times, it is almost as if the reality of war completely vanishes from Lacedaemonia. The interesting tension (or paradox) found at the heart of so many republican authors (including Rousseau) thus seems to reach its climax in Mably: the abbé often expresses his deep admiration for *puissance*, military virtue and the love of glory, precisely as he condemns war, ambition and military conquest. In his *Observations sur l’histoire de la Grèce* for instance, he suggests that Sparta shows us how to create good states that are “truly happy and powerful.”¹⁰⁴ And yet, in a piece written roughly at the same time (*Entretiens de Phocion*), Mably chastizes his contemporaries for (wrongly) associating happiness with *puissance* and riches.¹⁰⁵

Mably suggests that the Spartans’ love of peace was infectious and easily spread around Greece: this love was, in fact, the main reason for the success of Greece’s early federalism. It is here that we find the third distinctive feature of Mably’s Sparta: the importance Mably attaches to this federal arrangement and the great credit he gives to ‘peaceful Sparta’ in this federalism. Contra a bullying Athens, Sparta was able to spread her gospel of peace simply by being a model of moderation, poverty and justice. No arms or threats were needed: “*without having the need to arm its citizens or to put them in the field*, [Sparta] often calmed the domestic seditions of the Greeks with a single envoy.”¹⁰⁶ In these pages of Mably, one finds once again the somewhat naïve premise that a city can have citizen-soldiers who devote all their time and mental energies to military training and yet still be perfectly peace-loving. As we will see shortly, it is this unconvincing premise that many critics challenged in their battle against Mably’s ‘Spartan myth’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Mably, *Observations sur l’histoire de la Grèce*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ Mably, *Observations*, p. 153 (my italics).

¹⁰⁵ E.g. *Entretiens de Phocion sur le rapport de la morale avec la politique* (Amsterdam, 1763), p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ Mably, *Observations*, p. 32. My italics.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. see Cornelius De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques* (more on his work below). Many contemporaries of Mably criticized him for his overall naiveté about Sparta—a charge that is not completely unfair according to Jean-Louis Lecercle: “quand il parle de Lycurgue et de Lacédémone, la volonté d’idéalisat[i]on est évidente... Les Spartiates ont exercé une dictature féroce sur les hilotes, ils ont exterminé les Messéniens. Tant pis! Mably efface le plus possible ces ombres.” See “Utopie et réalisme politique chez Mably”, p. 1059. Cf. De Coste, *Pour une utopie du bon sens* (Paris, 1975), pp. 68–69.

Now, Rousseau and Mably both thought that they were untimely, that they were alone in their battles against luxury and decadence, alone in their celebration of Sparta. But their perception of things was largely skewed. Amongst the *philosophes* who took a significant and positive interest in ancient Greece, a great number preferred Sparta to Athens. Rousseau and Mably were not lonely voices: both Helvétius' *De l'Esprit*¹⁰⁸ and the *Encyclopédie* paint Lacedaemonia in an extremely favorable light.¹⁰⁹ In the entry 'Sparte ou Lacédémone', the Chevalier de Jaucourt even indulges in a fair bit of Lycurgomania: "Perhaps we should see in Lycurgus he who of all philosophers has best understood human nature, he who saw best just how far the laws, education, and society could change man".¹¹⁰ Contrary to the likes of Voltaire and Montesquieu who saw in Sparta the land of gloom and radical austerity, Jaucourt suggests that the Lacedaemonians were the happiest people alive, taking joy in their simple meals, musical festivities, and in their military training. If Sparta certainly oriented all its activities and laws towards military life and military virtue, this was done only for the sake of *remaining free*, not in order to bully other city-states. And finally, like many other *philosophes*, Jaucourt ascribes the responsibility for Sparta's decline to Athens: "it was the ambition and the power of Athens that *forced Lacedaemonia to corrupt itself* by making it introduce the use of gold and silver, & send its citizens to distant countries from which they returned covered in glory & bearing foreign vices."¹¹¹ If Jaucourt, Mably and Rousseau seem to have expressed what a few other *philosophes* also believed, such exultant praise of Sparta did not go unchallenged for very long. This surprisingly strong mid-18th century laconism soon enough became the object of heated criticism—and along with it came a questioning (if at times implicit) of the 'old' ways of doing history. In the eyes of some, to get rid of the 'myth of Sparta' required one to embrace '*la critique historique*'.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. *De l'Esprit*, see especially 'Discours III'.

¹⁰⁹ See also François Turpin, *L'histoire du gouvernement des anciennes républiques* (1769). Some scholars have questioned Jaucourt's sincerity, pointing to the contradictions in his treatments of Athens and Sparta. E.g. Roberts, p. 169. Roberts insists that the *Encyclopédie* was fairly favorable to Athens but compare with Grell, *Le dix-huitième*, p. 478.

¹¹⁰ Jaucourt, 'Sparte ou Lacédémone', *Encyclopédie*, 15: 432.

¹¹¹ Jaucourt, 'Sparte ou Lacédémone', in *Encyclopédie*, 15: 434.

The anti-Sparta Reaction: Voltaire, De Pauw et al.

We have seen above that many French *philosophes* perpetuated the tradition of 'Athens bashing' that began with Plato and Xenophon—repeating the same (and by now slightly tired) clichés about its democratic anarchy, decadent luxury, imperialism and the great 'villain' Pericles.¹¹² But there were a few dissident voices in the 18th century that contested these clichés and sought to rehabilitate Athens—a rehabilitation that typically proceeded by way of a long attack against Sparta. One can think of Voltaire, of course, but also of Cornelius de Pauw, Jean-François de Vauvilliers and Mathon de la Cour.¹¹³ If these last three figures are now almost forgotten, we will see that their work on ancient Greece offered reflections that equaled or even excelled Voltaire's in richness—particularly when it is Athenian history that is at stake.

It is not surprising that Voltaire's 'rehabilitation' of Athens could have had a certain superficiality to it: after all, *le philosophe de Ferney* did not care about Athenian institutions or mores *per se*. As we noted above, Athens was to Voltaire primarily a weapon to be deployed in his battle against intolerance and the critics of luxury:¹¹⁴ historical depictions could therefore be short, caricatural, and superficial. Erudite or ancient sources could be almost non-existent. As Mat-Hasquin aptly puts it, "one does not compose good polemics with the scruples of an erudite scholar. Voltaire sacrificed the Greek historians for the cause of progress."¹¹⁵ Polemic is thus largely what drives Voltaire's most famous paean to Athens and most famous attack against Sparta:

What good did Sparta do for Greece? Did it ever have a Demosthenes, a Sophocles, an Apelles, or a Phidias? The luxury of Athens made great men of all sorts; Sparta had but a few captains, and even fewer than other cities. But what a wonder that such a tiny republic as Lacedaemonia can conserve

¹¹² To my knowledge, the best treatment of this 'anti-Athenian' tradition is that of Roberts.

¹¹³ I could have drawn on many other authors (e.g. La Vauguyon, Linguet, Chastellux).—but for the sake of brevity, I have decided to focus in this section on writers who have either engaged directly with Rousseau and Mably, or who have sought to rehabilitate Athens (instead of dismissing antiquity as a whole).

¹¹⁴ E.g. N. Loraux et P. Vidal-Naquet, "La formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise".

¹¹⁵ Mat-Hasquin, *Voltaire et l'antiquité*, p. 247. To depict Voltaire as a champion of 'progress' perhaps needs no great defense; but see for instance 'Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Moland éd., vol. 27, p. 266.

its poverty. One will achieve death just as easily in lacking everything as in enjoying that which renders life pleasant.¹¹⁶

Voltaire expresses here his irritation with the naïve laconism of the likes of Rousseau, and he elsewhere chastises Bayle for his overly critical assessment of Athenian democracy. It is imperative to see Athens in a different light. In his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Bayle had suggested that there was much more abuse and tyranny in democratic Athens than in Macedonia.¹¹⁷ Voltaire strongly disagreed: while it is true that Athens ostracized and killed a few of its citizens, most Athenians nevertheless regretted their mistakes and acknowledged them as unjust (no small collective feat).¹¹⁸ Voltaire repeatedly insisted that the ‘intolerance’ of the Athenians towards Socrates was an exception, not a rule. “It is true that the Athenians made him drink hemlock; but we know how much they repented of this action . . . Athens allowed complete liberty not merely to philosophy, but to all religions.”¹¹⁹ Here and elsewhere, Voltaire insisted on the Athenians’ humanity, eloquence, politeness, artistic genius, and freedom. Their philosophy might have been full of ‘chimères’ and their science far inferior to that of moderns like Newton, but the Athenians nevertheless deserved our deepest respect¹²⁰—which did not, however, necessitate spending one’s entire time reading Plutarch or Thucydides (as Mably claims he did every day). Time was far too precious and history too vast for that.¹²¹

But even if Voltaire despises the *anticomanie* of the “petits compilateurs”,¹²² he is unwilling to discard the ‘goods’ provided by the example of Athens. Just as the frugal and virtuous Sparta was so central to Rousseau’s polemic against the champions of the arts and polite society, Voltaire needed his

¹¹⁶ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, dans OC, Moland éd., vol. 20, p. 47. Cf. *Défense du Mondain, ou L'Apologie du Luxe*, in OC, Moland éd., vol. 10, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ The specific line written by Bayle that so provoked Voltaire (and that he cites here) is the following: “Qu'on chercherait en vain dans l'histoire de Macédoine autant de tyrannie que l'histoire d'Athènes nous en présente” *Dictionnaire philosophique*, article ‘Démocratie’, in OC, Moland éd., vol. 18, p. 331.

¹¹⁸ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, article ‘Démocratie’, in OC, Moland éd., vol. 18, p. 333.

¹¹⁹ Voltaire, *La philosophie de l'histoire* (Slatkine, 1996), p. 152. See also the *Essai sur les mœurs*.

¹²⁰ E.g. the entries ‘Anciens et Modernes’, ‘Antiquité’, ‘Démocratie’, ‘Philosophie’, ‘Système’, in *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.

¹²¹ Voltaire, ‘Histoire’, in *L'Encyclopédie*, 8: 222. See also ‘Le pyrrhonisme de l'histoire’, p. 246.

¹²² Voltaire, ‘Système’, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, OC, Moland éd., vol. 20, p. 471.

Athens to fight his own battles. But if Voltaire thought it important to give Athens a new and more generous assessment, he did not consider it worthy of his time to criticize at length the chimerical ‘myth of Sparta’ proposed by the likes of Rousseau and Mably. Many others, however, took up this challenge. Exasperated by two decades of lyrical ‘Sparta-mania’, several *gens de lettres* in the mid and late 18th century devoted countless pages to taking down Sparta from her glorious pedestal.

Few things could capture more clearly this rapid ‘rise and fall’ of Sparta than a brief comparison between two prize-winning discourses: Rousseau’s *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and that offered to the Académie Royale des Inscriptions & Belles Lettres by Mathon de la Cour (1738–1793) in 1767. The question posed by the Académie Royale was the following: “To what extent and due to what causes were the laws of Lycurgus altered in Lacedaemonia to the point that they were fully annihilated?” If the question indicates the importance that Spartan history played on the literary radar screen of France at the time, the answer proposed by Mathon de la Cour suggests that the wind was already turning, that ancient Sparta was not going to get the ‘easy ride’ it got in many writings of the 1750s and early 1760s.¹²³ After providing his readers with a concise accounts of Lycurgus’ laws, De la Cour identifies what he sees as the main reasons for Sparta’s decline (e.g. the laws themselves were wrong; the ephores were too powerful; the introduction of riches precipitated the fall). What is significant here is that Athens is *not* to be blamed for Sparta’s fall; the author thinks we should rather blame *Lycurgus* himself (in Rousseau and Mably, Lycurgus was beyond reproach). For Mathon de la Cour, Lycurgus’ laws were completely unnatural and were bound to stimulate hubris amongst the Lacedaemonians.¹²⁴ It was misguided to hope that keeping men in poverty would *prevent* the growth of greed. Things work the other way around in his view: it is Sparta’s laws regarding wealth that eventually fuelled acquisitiveness and envy amongst the Spartans.¹²⁵

In a single breath, De la Cour thus censures Sparta’s excessive frugality, its cult of Lycurgus, its xenophobia and cruelty:

¹²³ C.f. De Gourcy, *Histoire philosophique et politique des Loix de Lycurgue*. (Gourcy embraces a thesis most contrary to that of Mathon de la Cour.)

¹²⁴ Mathon de la Cour, *Par quelles causes et par quels degrés les Loix de Lycurgue se sont altérées chez les Lacédémoniens jusqu’à ce qu’elles aient été anéanties* (Paris, 1767), pp. 13–14.

¹²⁵ Mathon de la Cour, *Par quelles causes*, p. 33. “La pauvreté où ils avaient vécu ne servit qu’à les rendre les plus avarés de tous les Grecs”.

The belief that a God had dictated their laws, the disdain that he [Lycurgus] gave them for foreign customs, the tyrannical empire that they exercised over their slaves, the perfect equality that reigned among them, the austerity of their mores, their idleness, their very ignorance, everything helped make them believe that they were high above other men, & this opinion of theirs often proved disastrous.¹²⁶

The Spartans, convinced that they were a unique and ‘chosen’ people, could thus not resist the urge to conquer and dominate others—and De la Cour underscores the dangers of mixing this hubris with a highly militaristic culture: “Lycurgus wanted to make a people who were nothing but warriors. This project is not merely opposed to the wish of nature, but it exposes one to a thousand dangers. *A bellicose people will necessarily be at war with its neighbours*, or incite seditions at home.”¹²⁷ De la Cour is thus here drawing our attention to one of the many blind-spots of Mably’s laconism—i.e. the naive conviction that a political community could have its entire *ethos* structured around military virtue and war, and yet . . . remain at peace.

Now, if Mathon De la Cour did not obtain the fame that Rousseau harvested with his own discourse, his sober assesment of Sparta was nevertheless appreciated by many hellenists—most notably by Jean-François Vauvilliers (1737–1801). Professor of Greek at the Collège de France, Vauvilliers also published a lengthy reply to Mably in 1769, under the title *Examen historique et politique du gouvernement de Sparte*. Like Mathon de La Cour (and *contra* Mably), Vauvilliers denounced the ‘esprit conquérant’ of the Lacedaemonians and underscored at great lengths the terrible treatment of the Helots (and here he was explicitly reproaching Mably for having been a poor historian). “I find in history”, he writes, “*no other* trace of such a universal cruelty.”¹²⁸ Vauvilliers also criticized Mably for overstating the equality and distribution of goods in Sparta, as well as for failing to appreciate the military fanaticism shown by the Lacedaemonians.

If De la Cour and Vauvilliers did not offer in their work extensive reflections on the ways of writing good (ancient) history, Cornelius De Pauw’s *Recherches philosophiques sur les Grecs* are certainly rich in that regard. Closely read by Benjamin Constant, De Pauw’s work on Greece is nowadays rarely discussed—despite the fact that his significant influence

¹²⁶ De la Cour, *Par quelles causes*, p. 20.

¹²⁷ De la Cour, *Par quelles causes*, pp. 17–18.

¹²⁸ *Examen historique et politique du gouvernement de Sparte ou Lettre à un ami sur la législation de Lycorgue* (Paris, 1769), p. 26. My italics.

on ancient historiography has repeatedly been noted. For Vidal-Naquet, Nicole Loraux and Jennifer Roberts, it is largely thanks to De Pauw that the 19 and 20th centuries finally came to embrace Athens over Sparta.¹²⁹ As such, De Pauw was not entirely wrong to suggest, at the very end of his 500 pages *Recherches philosophiques*, that his work would demolish for good the myth of Sparta and, simultaneously, show Athens for what it was: a stable and virtuous city, full of commerce and enlightenment. This was going to be his contribution to the progress of humanity—for it was clear, according to him, that the bad histories penned by the likes of Rollin, Mably and Rousseau had most definitely been an obstacle to the advancement of the human mind.

It was in the interest of humanity to dissipate the prejudices that raised the barbaric inhabitants of ancient Sparta to the same level of illustrious glory as the most enlightened societies of Greece, whose knowledge and lights have never ceased to guide posterity, first in the culture of the agreeable arts, and second in the study of all the great objects concerning philosophy and legislation, without which men can exist, but without which they would know neither how to be happy nor respectable.¹³⁰

At several points in his two-volume *Recherches philosophiques*, De Pauw draws explicit connections between *anticomanie*, laconism and an anti-Enlightenment (or anti-progress) historical posture. He praises the hellenist and historian Jean-François Vauvilliers for giving readers an honest account of what Mably is: an unreflective historian (overtaken by his love of Sparta) and an enemy of progress. In Mably's work, De Pauw writes, "there is no truth, or even likelihood, in anything he says about Lycurgus, the sharing of land, of Sparta or the Spartans." The abbé's history is an obstacle to the "progress of enlightenment" and "to the development of literature."¹³¹

For De Pauw, progress and '*la critique historique*' can only be on the side of Athens—whereas '*l'érudition confuse*' and '*la compilation*' tend to be on the side of Sparta.¹³² Cornelius De Pauw follows in the footsteps of many *philosophes* when he sets himself up in opposition to all 'compilateurs'—to all those *compilateurs* who can effortlessly put together an

¹²⁹ Roberts; also N. Loraux & P. Vidal-Naquet, "La formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise".

¹³⁰ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 426. Also under fire is Monsieur de Gourcy. "il a confondu, tous les faits; et ensuite il a encore confondu toutes les époques", t.II, pp. 280–81.

¹³¹ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, pp. 263–64.

¹³² De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, pp. 340–41.

erudite book, but without much in the way of reflection. Good historical work is a challenge, and he thinks *he* has successfully answered this challenge by proposing to his contemporaries “a thorough and reasoned work in which the wondrous has no place and in which we examine the facts carefully before placing them in the order of historical truths.”¹³³ As we will now see, De Pauw’s “vérités historiques” about antiquity are remarkable partially in that they seem to be the exact opposite of those proposed by Mably and Rousseau.

De Pauw’s Greece is an original, peculiar Greece. First, De Pauw almost completely overturns the standard (and very old) associations between Sparta and frugality, and Athens and luxury. According to De Pauw, Athenian luxury and material comforts have been greatly overstated: the parallel made by the likes of Montesquieu between ancient Athens and modern Paris is nonsensical. He observes that, compared to an average Parisian hotel, the homes of Athenians were not much better than basic huts (*chaumières*).¹³⁴ Athens might have been the city of great art, of hard work and manufactures, but it was certainly not the land of idle consumption and moral decadence—rather, Sparta was. Athens exported many of its manufactured goods and what remained on Athenian soil was consumed in *moderation* by Athenian gentlemen.¹³⁵ And besides, if there were some ‘comforts’ and luxury items in Athens, these hardly need to be frowned upon in his view: after all, these items were earned through hard work, discipline and business savvy.¹³⁶ They were not—as they were in Sparta’s case—the spoils of unjust wars.¹³⁷ Hence, for De Pauw, the Athenians deserved their (modest) material goods because they labored for them; and their consumption habits did not necessarily entail a loss of virtue.

If according to De Pauw Athens is the land of material simplicity and of a healthy work ethic, Sparta is the land of idleness and debauchery. Indeed, De Pauw is convinced that the frugality of Sparta has also been overstated and that Spartan messes, for instance, were full of delicacies and wine (contra Athenian meals, which were very frugal in his view). What is more, he insists that Sparta’s homes and public places were far

¹³³ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, p. ix.

¹³⁴ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, p. 282.

¹³⁵ But the material consumption of vain Athenian women was, according to De Pauw, a much less virtuous affair. e.g. *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, pp. 318–19.

¹³⁶ E.g. *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, pp. 286–291. Also see t.I, 5^e section, “Du commerce et des finances des Athéniens.”

¹³⁷ Compare with Mably, *Observations*, pp. 29–30.

more impressive and luxurious than those of Athens, and that Spartan coffers were truly overflowing with riches: "the hundred cities of Crete did not contain even half of the gold and silver that they succeeded in amassing in Lacedaemonia."¹³⁸ De Pauw recognizes that Sparta was not a place of commerce, but this did not prevent the city from having abundant luxuries. And these luxuries were hardly ethical ones: they were all pretty much the spoils of war; no good Spartan worked very hard to obtain material luxuries.¹³⁹ One should thus forever abandon the idea of Sparta as a land of frugality, self-control and virtue. De Pauw writes, on the contrary, that "there never was on the surface of the ancient continent a people more avaricious, more greedy, and more unjust."¹⁴⁰

In addition to severing the old connection between Sparta and frugality, De Pauw also sought to undermine the unusual connection Mably established between Lacedaemonia and a peace-loving *ethos*. For De Pauw, it is not peace that Sparta embraced as the greatest good, but rather brutal war. "Declared enemies of peace in Greece" he writes, the Spartans "counted peace *among the great public calamities*, and they only finished a war in order to begin another one."¹⁴¹ People ought, therefore, to rethink the way they have interpreted the fall of Greece to Macedonia: the fault is not Athens', it is not her 'over-reaching' and her corruption. The responsibility is all Sparta's—in particular, her excessive military and war-mongering spirit. The Spartans, De Pauw writes, were "always rebels . . . , always armed, *always at war*, always intolerable . . ."¹⁴² Sparta is not the land of stability and harmony depicted by Rousseau (whom De Pauw describes as "the most inconsistent reasoner who has ever been")¹⁴³ but rather, the land of blood and terror.¹⁴⁴ De Pauw thinks he is amongst the first to understand adequately Sparta's war loving spirit (what had been missing, *until him*, was "la critique historique").

it suffices to have mediocre powers of penetration to notice that a society uniquely composed of soldiers who died, as Aristotle said, in peace and lived in war could not be anything but a terrible pestilence for neighbouring

¹³⁸ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 351. Other relevant passages: t.II, p. 171, p. 363, pp. 371–72.

¹³⁹ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 370.

¹⁴⁰ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, p. ii. See also t.II, p. 355: Sparta was "une nation ennemie des mœurs et des arts de la paix".

¹⁴² De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 191; my italics. See also t.II, p. 265.

¹⁴³ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 167.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 241.

countries; we must thus envisage Lacedaemonia as the hearth from which burst forth the fires of civil discord.¹⁴⁵

Unsurprisingly then, De Pauw is convinced that Sparta did not play the admirable diplomatic role that Mably ascribed to it. The council of the Amphictyons (so central to Mably's understanding of early Greek federalism) had in fact no great authority, and, more importantly, the Spartans did everything they could to undermine the peaceful unity of the federation. Modern historians like Mably have failed to see "the utter nullity of these pretended estates general of Greece";¹⁴⁶ they have contented themselves with repeating old platitudes, instead of looking at facts critically.

Thus, De Pauw's Sparta is the land of luxury, greed, and war. It is also the land of gloom and darkness¹⁴⁷—and here, De Pauw's analysis is certainly less unusual or novel. Apart from Helvétius, most admirers of Sparta would have readily agreed with the suggestion that Lacedaemonia was a place where silence and sobriety were celebrated. But few pro-Spartans would have agreed with De Pauw's thesis that Sparta's 'gloominess' also entailed and fuelled unprecedented cruelty and utter barbarism.¹⁴⁸

In short, De Pauw turns the myth of Sparta completely on its head—subjecting almost every bit of Enlightenment laconophilia (and of Greek historiography) to relentless criticism. But De Pauw is involved in more than a destructive enterprise: he seeks to build a new and very positive story of Athens—a new 'myth of Athens' perhaps. As we noted previously, De Pauw's Athens is a city of virtuous farmers and gentlemen who work hard and appreciate the benefits of trade and enlightenment—without, however, surrendering to corrupt idleness and greed. 'Facts and reason' suggested, according to De Pauw, that Athens was not synonymous with anarchy and corruption: rather, the city was a heaven of good order and respect for laws.¹⁴⁹ And if the Athenian people did sometimes change their minds after making a regrettable collective mistake, this shows not fickleness, but rather, good sense and reflectivity.

De Pauw did not, however, completely repudiate some of the charges laid against Athens by Sparta enthusiasts like Mably. He did not challenge, for instance, the fact that Athens had an empire, that it sought expansion, and that it often bullied small cities all over Greece. But he tried to

¹⁴⁵ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.I, p. xi.

¹⁴⁶ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 183.

¹⁴⁷ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 254 & p. 340.

¹⁴⁸ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, pp. 269–71.

¹⁴⁹ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, pp. 168–69.

paint these charges in a new, positive light—so positive in fact that even bullying might be said to be valuable. De Pauw suggests that a great part of Athenian aggrandizement was forced by *necessity*—not by a failing in Athenian character.¹⁵⁰ And more significantly, he is convinced that we should in fact be grateful for this bellicose nature of Athens, for had it not been for her power and empire, Athens would have likely fallen to Sparta and we would not have benefitted from her great philosophy, art and commercial spirit. Rather than Enlightenment, we would have had only what the Spartans were capable of: “eternal darkness”. After all, writes De Pauw, “this was the spirit of their government, destructive of all light.”¹⁵¹ If the Spartan example was for the likes of Rousseau and Mably all about virtue, De Pauw turned Sparta’s history into a case of gloom, of cruelty, of oppression and vice.

Conclusion

In her monumental study of the French Enlightenment’s Hellenism, Chantal Grell has suggested that the heated disputes over Greek history (and the relative merits of Spartan and Athenian socio-political life) were not, at base, historiographical battles. In her view, these battles had little to do with the past; they were, rather, about the present. “The history of the institutions and the political life of antiquity was thus the object of *ideological* debate, and *not historical or historiographical discussions*,” writes Grell. “Antiquity was not studied for its own sake: it constituted the material for constructing models.”¹⁵² We have certainly seen in this chapter that Mably and Rousseau’s deployments of Spartan history were heavily polemical and often politically-loaded. And we have also repeatedly observed the fact that Voltaire did not care much about Athens *per se*—he was only concerned with Athens’ history insofar as it gave him ammunition for his battles against *l’infâme* and against the critics of progress and luxury.

That said, it would be incorrect to claim that there was no significant historiographical substance to some of the acrimonious exchanges between Mably and Voltaire, or between Mably and Cornelius de Pauw. We saw that Mably, for instance, genuinely cared about rectifying certain

¹⁵⁰ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, p. 176.

¹⁵¹ De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, t.II, pp. 161–63.

¹⁵² Grell, p. 547. My italics.

historical *facts* about Greek federalism; and Cornelius de Pauw's desire to bring down the excessively romanticized picture of Sparta was certainly not solely motivated by ideology. Indeed, one can often find, interlaced with the *philosophes'* ideological and political commitments, sharp and meticulous critiques of particular ways of writing and of thinking about history. Besides, there is something artificial in the neat separation Grell makes in the passage cited above between the historiographical and the ideological/political. If the French Enlightenment no doubt wanted history to be useful and to serve (present-day) political battles, this need not suggest that its historiographical concerns were any less authentic. The 'presentism' that informed Enlightenment battles over the relative merits of Athens and Sparta was part of what made history and historiography such urgent philosophical concerns. The rancorous polemic that coloured these debates is a testament to the importance of the underlying questions about commerce, luxury, republicanism and war. Both students of eighteenth-century political thought and of historiography stand to learn a great deal in revisiting neglected texts such as Mably's *De la manière d'étudier l'histoire* or unfamiliar figures such as Cornelius De Pauw.

14. ROMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN BEYOND GIBBON: ANCIENT NORMS OF EMPIRE FOR MODERNS

C. Akça Ataç

In the eighteenth century, history-writing underwent a significant change across Europe consequent to historians' attempt to transform it into a science similar to law with a concrete set of rules to be followed universally. With the groundbreaking contribution of archaeology, numismatics, cartography, as well as the application of proper footnoting, history reached an advanced level, at which it provided a more compendious knowledge of the past than ever before.

Prominent eighteenth-century historians aspired to "scientific objectivity" and claimed that historical knowledge could be acquired and evaluated through rigorous methods.¹ Such claims reached a zenith in Britain particularly within the Scottish Enlightenment. Historians thought their work would serve to reveal norms, values, and facts about wars, diplomatic maneuvers, political regimes, legal and administrative systems, as well as about the characters of monarchs, agriculture, marital practices, and social life. In educated circles, history thus came to be seen as a "a moral or political exemplar"² As the range of topics treated by historians extended to encompass political ideals, virtue, and liberty, history assumed a normative role, directly and indirectly providing solutions to the problems that preoccupied the philosophical mind. In this way, history as science took on a philosophical dimension.

The philosophical history of the eighteenth century probed the past actions of mankind to establish a normative behavior code for the contemporary political man. To serve this purpose, the historian was expected to be concerned with collecting the scattered information from the past in order to turn it into a meaningful whole that would shed light on contemporary political, religious, and philosophical debates. While recounting the common experiences of mankind, philosophical history, to a great extent, dwelt on the rise, decline, and fall of states and civilizations. This

¹ Linda Kirk, 'The Matter of Enlightenment,' *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 1143.

² John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1993), p. 44.

aspect of history in particular was in compliance with the moral responsibility of instructing the men of the age in civil prudence through examples of the past. Monarchs, prominent politicians, and statesmen were among the target audience.

Historians were particularly drawn to ancient history, convinced that one could learn valuable lessons for modern political life from ancient experience. Following those ancient states that achieved grandness and avoiding their mistakes would endow modern states with a chance of endurance. Within the context of such expectations, Britain grew very receptive to ancient wisdom in the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth-century ancient history texts of the British historians, with the exception of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, have not been assessed for the instructions they contained about empire.³ Among the scholars of Enlightenment historiography, there has been a deep-seated conviction that "in its time Gibbon's work was unique."⁴ As such, current studies have altogether neglected eighteenth-century Roman historiography outside Gibbon as worthy of elaboration and emphasis. The possibility that Roman historiography might contribute to the literature on eighteenth-century understandings of the British Empire has not yet been exhausted either. This chapter aims to remind readers of the fact that Roman histories other than that of Gibbon were written, published, and read in Britain in the eighteenth century and that some of them were, in fact, fine examples of the Enlightenment's philosophical history. In doing so, it seeks to pin down the kinds of empire that those historians offered by way of model and warning to contemporary readers.

History-Writing in the Eighteenth Century

With the Renaissance, history acquired something of the prestige that theology had enjoyed in the Middle Ages. Cleansed of myths and forgeries, history acquired a higher degree of accuracy. In the following centuries, it grew into an elegant, informative and popular literary form, read widely for its "defining quality of truthfulness"⁵ across Europe. One of the

³ For Gibbon's notion of the ideal empire, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁴ John Burrow, *A History of Histories* (London, 2009), p. 354.

⁵ Philip Hicks, *Neo-Classical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (London, 1996), p. 11.

principal duties attributed to history was to put forward the political and moral examples to be followed in public and private spheres, hence to serve “as a source of precedent and a means of establishing norms.”⁶ Historical study, properly done, could teach polite members of political society “to conduct armies, secure conquests, invent necessary laws, restrain the intemperate rule of princes and acquire power and happiness.”⁷ What is more, alongside its erudite quality, good history was supposed to be entertaining. Dull language was an offense equal to incorrect historical knowledge. Only accurate, instructive, and entertaining history enjoyed the readership of eminent political figures of the age.

To understand better how history was conceived in eighteenth-century Britain, one needs to scrutinize the *artes historicae* of the time. The *artes historicae* were the manuals, which had first appeared in the sixteenth century to prescribe “the ways or means of studying or writing history.” In accordance with the “Humanist wish to acquire a more orderly system among the traditional disciplines,”⁸ they aimed to convey the criteria set by the classical authorities of antiquity. Two of the most significant *artes historicae* of eighteenth-century Britain were unsurprisingly in French, since the British learned much from the French historians. Pierre Le Moyne’s *Of the Art Both of Writing and Judging of History* (London, 1695) and Charles Rollin’s *De la manière d’enseigner et d’étudier les belles-lettres* (Paris, 1726–28) provided the most widely accepted definitions of history. In Le Moyne’s words, history “is a continued narration of things true, great, and public, writ with spirit, eloquence and judgment; for instruction to particulars and princes, and [the] good of civil society.”⁹ Therefore, historians essentially addressed princes and other influential statesmen with the hope of playing a prominent role in their education. However, this particular interest in the dignified reader did not render the common people less of a concern for historians. According to Rollin, historical instruction was the way to make an *honnête homme* of the non-polite individual.¹⁰

No different than their ancient predecessors and European contemporaries, the British historians, too, were concerned with ways of writing

⁶ Kenyon, *History Men*, p. 2.

⁷ Anon., *Reflections on Ancient and Modern History* (Oxford, 1746), p. 6.

⁸ Astrid Witschi-Bernz, ‘Main Trends in Historical Method Literature: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries,’ *History and Theory*, 12 (1972), 51 and 52.

⁹ Pierre Le Moyne, *Of the Art both of Writing and Judging of History* (London, 1695), p. 53.

¹⁰ Charles Rollin, *D’Enseigner et d’Etudier les Belles-Lettres* (Paris, 1726), p. 13.

good history. *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690) by William Temple, *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694) and *A Defence of the Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1705) by William Wotton, *A Dissertation on Reading the Classics and Forming a Just Style* (1709) by Henry Felton, *Ductor Historicus* (1711) by Thomas Hearne, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (1735) by Lord Bolingbroke, and *An Essay on the Manner of Writing History* (1746) by Peter Whalley were the significant British *historicae artes*. Despite their differences of opinion on what kind of history should be written and read, these authors demonstrated a profound faith in the use of history as a means of creating a moral code of action for the political elite.

A common conviction embedded in the *historicae artes* suggested that past events followed common patterns—after “all their turns and forms,” they eventually came “about to the same point where they first began.”¹¹ This insight should guide the political man to arrive at norms for the military, overseas expansion, or fair elections. As best expressed by Lord Bolingbroke:

[T]here are certain general principles, and rules of life and conquest, which always must be true, because they are conformable to the invariable nature of things. He who studies history, as he would study philosophy, will soon distinguish and collect them, and by doing so will soon form to himself a general system of ethics and politics on the surest foundations, on the trial of these principles and rules in all ages, and on the confirmation of them by universal experience.¹²

The readers of history were ideally required “to equally take notice of good and evil, to imitate the one and avoid the other.”¹³

The study of history in eighteenth-century Britain was grounded in the idea of “a constant improvement in private and public virtue”¹⁴ for the purpose of making better men and better citizens. The common man could sometimes have difficulties grasping the true meaning of the histories, but the monarch and prominent statesmen would improve through the moral and virtuous lessons embedded in those texts. According to

¹¹ Thomas Hearne, *Ductor Historicus: Or, a Short System of Universal History, and an Introduction to the Study of It* (London, 1705), I, p. 123.

¹² Henry St John Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (London, 1779), p. 53.

¹³ Richard Rawlinson (trn.), *A New Method of Studying History, Geography and Chronology with a Catalogue of the Chief Historians of all Nations* (London, 1730), I, p. 24.

¹⁴ Bolingbroke, *Study and Use of History*, p. 14.

Hearne, for instance, a history should consist of two parts: narration and political reflections. Narration was the body of the text that aimed to “relate impartially all remarkable actions of this life,” whereas political reflections were the soul of the text that set forth the examples “to be imitated upon all occasions.”¹⁵ The political reflections aimed at faultless, great, and virtuous statesmen:

The statesman travels in the field of history, to enrich himself with maxims of prudence and civil policy; and these, as a map or chart, point out to him those rocks and sands he should avoid in the administration of the republic, and which those who sit at the helm ought necessarily to be acquainted with.¹⁶

Eighteenth-century historiography also displayed a novel interest in critical approaches and interdisciplinary contributions from philology, paleography, and archaeology.¹⁷ Within this context, chronologies, compilations, collections and annals of the old humanist tradition were dismissed as “plodding” and “uninspired,” because they lacked a detailed and illuminating commentary, despite the massive list of facts that they contained.¹⁸ Previous history texts were indeed the verbatim translations of the primary sources to a great extent, and if not, they were plain descriptions of various collections held by the antiquarians. These “unscholarly” and “unhistorical”¹⁹ works failed to fulfill the requirement of instructing and guiding the reader. As such, the eighteenth-century historian rolled up his sleeves to excel this current level of history-writing, as he aspired to discover historical truth and sought to offer clear instructions by meticulous and critical analyses of the primary sources. In doing so, he developed a new concern for the right and sufficient use of footnotes, appendices, and indices more intensely than his predecessors.

History-writing thus grew more complex and better defined, and its topics more varied. The range of subjects that preoccupied the historians was eventually expanded to embrace geography, culture, manners, religion and many more in addition to the usual ones such as politics and war. The historians, therefore, began to offer “new views about how

¹⁵ Hearne, *Ductor Historicus*, I, p. 120.

¹⁶ [Peter Whalley], *An Essay on the Manner of Writing History* (London, 1746), p. 11.

¹⁷ John Hale Rigby, *The Evolution of British Historiography: from Bacon to Namier* (Cleveland, New York, 1964), p. 29.

¹⁸ Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Maryland, 1991), p. 9.

¹⁹ Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London, 1983), p. 11.

society operated in the past and present.” They offered “philosophical history, which was concerned with all aspects of civilization.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the improving quality of historical writing did not prevent some historians from being caught up in the party polemics of eighteenth-century Britain. The attempt to score in the Tory-Whig debate in a way “trammelled”²¹ the history business, particularly ancient history-writing, since party authors commonly sought to make their points by using examples taken from antiquity.

Because history texts were considered as providing political and moral examples for statecraft, the interdependence of history and politics in the eighteenth century is undeniable. It is not possible to come across a history that was free of politics and a historian who was completely impartial at the time when the favorite topics were the notions of kingship and governance as moral activity.²² Even so, many ancient historians of Britain, before and after Gibbon, tried to stay away from “abusive, small minded partisanship”²³ and “valued classical correctness next to godliness.”²⁴

The Meaning of Ancient History

The eighteenth century witnessed across Europe a remarkable increase in the number of ancient Roman and Greek history texts. Neo-classicism, in James William Johnson’s words, was

an ideological construct, taking many of its assumptions from traditional sources and modifying them by current beliefs with the urge to rediscover and preserve *all* of the ancient culture.²⁵

The chief inspiration eighteenth-century neo-classicism drew on was the common belief in its own utility in analyzing and understanding the past and present better by means of ancient examples: “Neo-classicism was

²⁰ Philip Hicks, ‘Bolingbroke, Clarendon, and the Role of Classical Historian,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 20 (1987), 471.

²¹ Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, p. 5.

²² Jeremy Black, ‘Ideology, History, Xenophobia and the World of Print in Eighteenth-Century England’ in Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory (eds), *Culture, Politics and Society in Britain 1660–1800* (Manchester, 1991), p. 208.

²³ Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (London, 1996), p. 45.

²⁴ Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 1.

²⁵ James William Johnson, ‘What was Neo-Classicism?’, *Journal of British Studies*, 9 (1969), 52.

thoroughly empirical. And it was unashamedly utilitarian." The completeness of ancient history displayed the whole picture of events, all major and minor causes and effects and rendered itself utterly applicable to contemporary politics. A conviction grounded in the "neo-classical conception of cyclism"²⁶ suggested that a parallelism existed between the past and present political phenomena.

In the eyes of many ancient-history enthusiasts of eighteenth-century Britain, the complete picture of antiquity essentially depicted a kind of dynamic cyclism, in which civilizations rose and fell. It was the ancients who had first experienced this cycle of birth, growth, maturation, decline and death; but all nations were subject to it. The same historical patterns would probably have resulted in the same end, which was irrecoverable degeneration. For British statesmen and those who wrote for them, one of the ways to prevent, or at least delay, this degeneration and preserve stability was the meticulous examination of ancient history. Ancient history was full of lessons and it would teach the nation to follow the footsteps of the ancients to greatness and avoid the mistakes that had caused their fall. In this way, the British would constantly make progress and even find the universal rules to establish balance and enduring order.

The number of the political works with a claim to ancient wisdom had been increasing since the Renaissance. Throughout the early modern period, writes Mark Salber Phillips (drawing on Arnaldo Momigliano), they appeared in the form of either narrative text or antiquarian study. "The first (often called, without further qualification, 'history') is the narrative of public events. The former, which came to be called simply 'history', was the narrative of events organized in linear and causal fashion"²⁷ without caring much about the tangible remains of antiquity. The latter exhibited the "non-literary remnants of antiquity"²⁸ such as the philological, geographical, numismatic, epigraphic, or archaeological facts, while completely ignoring political narrative. Ancient history's aspiration to complete truth was somehow enhanced.

The eighteenth century opened with the British extension of the ongoing continental quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns. This quarrel, which in England was dubbed the Battle of Books, remained inconclusive

²⁶ Idem, 53 and 63.

²⁷ Mark Salber Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), 297–8.

²⁸ Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 32.

and later faded away. It was fought in different areas such as science, technology, literature, and philosophy but, in Joseph Levine's words, this was "at bottom a dispute over the uses of the past, a quarrel about history."²⁹ Both sides wrote volumes of ancient histories for the sake of proving their method to be the fittest. The Ancients considered the task of history-writing as reinterpreting, sometimes imitating, the accounts of classical authors. They put the emphasis on literary style, in other words, on being entertainingly readable; in return they were attacked on the grounds that they ignored antiquarian scholarship. To them, in ancient history there was no room for "the intervention of any critical apparatus."³⁰ The Moderns depended on the findings of archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, and philology. Through "the critical capacities" that they developed, the study of ancient history began to bear considerably insightful results.³¹ Although they were criticized for writing unreadable texts without elegant narrative and ridiculed as "pedantic and frivolous, purveyors of mere curiosities of little value or interest to the rest of society,"³² the Moderns silently took over the Ancients' camp.

Regardless of who the winner was, the Battle of Books greatly contributed to eighteenth-century neo-classicism and ancient history-writing. The ancient history texts that appeared subsequent to this battle "formed the intellectual background to contemporary arguments as well as the educational foundation for scholars."³³ Undoubtedly, Britain's gradual transformation into a spatially extended empire challenged most of all the British themselves in the eighteenth century. Confronting this situation, classical historians of the age paid particular attention to the ancient notion of empire and attempted to draw the necessary lessons for their own emerging empire.

Roman History-Writing

Among the ancient histories, Roman history was attributed the highest authority and prestige as the source to be consulted in all political and

²⁹ Joseph Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, New York, 1987), p. 156.

³⁰ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon 1734–1764* (Cambridge, 1999), I, p. 149.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

³² Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, 34.

³³ R.M. Ogilvie, *Latin and Greek: A History of the Influence of the Classics on English Life from 1600 to 1918* (London, 1964), pp. xiii–xiv.

legal matters. As Thomas O'Connor states; "[o]ne could say that as the Scriptures were to worship and morals so the history of Rome was to civil government and law."³⁴ On account of its being a history of nations, hence universal and complete, Roman history was held in higher esteem than Greek history. And within the context of empire, Roman history was more precious again, since the Romans were the first to have experienced and overcome all the difficulties of becoming an intercontinental empire and managing to remain so. Roman civilization must have constituted a source of emulation for the British literati on account of its sophisticated governing mechanisms, just laws, refined culture, strong military, and above all, its durability. As a result, volumes of Roman histories, each aiming to supersede the existing ones, were written throughout the eighteenth century.

Roman historiography of eighteenth-century Britain was preoccupied first and foremost with demonstrating the ways of being a good monarch. This effort, known as "the mirror for a prince," was a "humanistic genre" very common in England.³⁵ Among its examples were Daniel Defoe's unfinished *Of Royal Education* (1728), Andrew Michael Ramsay's *A Plan of Education for a Young Prince* (1732) and, of course, Lord Bolingbroke's *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738).³⁶ The followers of this genre believed that the Rome owed its greatness to its virtuous men and the deeper knowledge of these characters would provide the distinguished British reader with Roman role models. In the quest for virtue, Roman history was an immense source, as "[t]he characters of great men to be met within are so numerous, that it may be affirmed, that there are models of all the moral virtues fit for everyone's imitation."³⁷ Under the influence of Virgil and Horace, the character that should attract the kings' utmost attention was considered to be the first emperor Augustus (31 BC–14 AD). This fascination with Augustus caused the first half of the eighteenth century to be called 'the Augustan Age.' During the reign of Augustus, Rome was transformed from a republic to an empire; new territorial acquisitions had increased to such an extent that "never before had one man ruled so much of the world." Such vast experience in empire-building attributed an almost normative quality to the Augustan age, as it displayed how "the

³⁴ Thomas O'Connor, *An Irish Theologian in Enlightenment France: Luke Joseph Hooke 1714–96* (Dublin, 1995), p. 20.

³⁵ David Armitage, "A Patriot for Whom? The Afterlives of Bolingbroke's Patriot King," *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), 401.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 401 n. 17.

³⁷ Rawlinson, *New Method*, p. 56.

idea of empire in the west" had evolved.³⁸ Augustus was also the subject of considerable attention and praise, because Jesus Christ was born in that extraordinary stretch of time.³⁹

At the hands of the British historians of Rome, Tiberius and Nero were presented as the archetypal worst rulers and Augustus the best. They instructed the present and future kings of Britain to become not a Tiberius but an Augustus. The Augustan period had witnessed an unprecedented territorial expansion and a miraculous level of peace and order, which did not generally accompany spatial expansion of such magnitude. Therefore, the British Augustus, too, should learn "to settle the world and throw open permanently the gates to the temple of peace."⁴⁰ In fact, whenever in the modern period of Britain a monarchical crisis was resolved or the kingdom's wealth and power were increased, the relevant reigning monarch was hailed as a possible Augustus. Charles II's reign, for example, had been celebrated as an Augustan era. Nevertheless, George I and II came to be associated with Augustus more than any other monarch in British history due to the republican polemic between Tories and Whigs. Despite the varying, some positive and some negative, representations of Augustus in the political pamphlets, Roman historiography treated him rather well.⁴¹

Eighteenth-Century Roman History Texts

From the very beginning of the century, many translations of Livy, Tacitus, as well as the poets Ovid, Virgil and Horace were published, among which those by John Dryden, Thomas Hearne, and Richard Bentley especially enjoyed a massive readership. Also, the renowned Roman histories in French such as Abbé de Vertot's *Histoire des révolutions arrivées dans le gouvernement de la république romaine* (1720), François Catrou and Pierre Julien Rouille's *Histoire romaine, depuis la fondation de Rome* (1728) and Charles Rollin's *Histoire romaine depuis la fondation de Rome jusqu'à la*

³⁸ Erskine-Hill, *Augustan Idea in English Literature*, p. x.

³⁹ Samuel Clarke. *The Life and Death of Julius Caesar... As Also the Life and Death of Augustus Caesar in whose Reign our Blessed Lord and Sovereign Jesus Christ was Borne*. London, 1665.

⁴⁰ James William Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1967), p. 18.

⁴¹ Among the polemical works were *Cato: A Tragedy* (1713) by Joseph Addison and *Cato's Letters* (1720–3) by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon.

Bataille d'Actium (1754) were translated into English. The prefaces of the Roman histories here dealt with demonstrate how much their authors were influenced and educated by these French texts, both in terms of context and method.⁴² In particular, de Vertot's history was considered to be a masterpiece.⁴³ Nevertheless, the French histories of Rome were extremely exhausting at the same time, since Catrou and Rouille's history was published in six volumes, and Rollin's history of sixteen volumes reached thirty volumes octavo with the contribution of Crevier upon Rollin's death. As such, British historians saw the need for new Roman histories that would not be "too voluminous for common use."⁴⁴

Although the first British history of Rome written in the eighteenth century was *The History of Rome: from the Death of Antoninus Pius, to the death of Severus Alexander* (1701) by William Wotton (1666–1727), Basil Kennet's *Roma Antiquae: Or, the Antiquities of Rome* (1696) should in fact be considered as the first since *Roma Antiquae* was an exceptional work that appeared at the end of the seventeenth century and taught the coming generation of historians how to write a good Roman history. Basil Kennet (1674–1715) had a countrywide reputation for his remarkable scholarship and pleasant character, which helped him remain a revered figure in the fervor of party polemics.⁴⁵ His eight-volume work went through several editions and took its place in the libraries of the coming generation of historians. Kennet dedicated *Roma Antiquae* to the Duke of Gloucester with the purpose of showing him "the most celebrated examples of virtue and great achievements" in history.⁴⁶

William Wotton's *The History of Rome from the Death of Antoninus Pius to the Death of Severus Alexander* was dedicated not to the Duke of Gloucester but his instructor, Gilbert Burnet, the Whig bishop of Salisbury, who "best knew how such a prince ought to be educated."⁴⁷ It was also widely believed that this history may have been "the first piece of Roman history"

⁴² See for example Nathaniel Hooke, *The Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth* (London, 1738), I, unpaginated preface.

⁴³ John Ozell, *Mr. Ozell's Defence against the Remarks Published by Peele and Woodward* (London, 1725), 7.

⁴⁴ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Roman History: From the Foundation of the City of Rome, to the Destruction of the Western Empire* (London, 1769), I, ii.

⁴⁵ C.E.A. Cheesman, 'Kennet, Basil (1674–1715)', first published 2004; online edn, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101015401/Basil-Kennet>.

⁴⁶ Basil Kennet, *Roma Antiquae Notitia: Or, the Antiquities of Rome* (London, 1696), unpaginated epistle dedicatory.

⁴⁷ William Wotton, *The History of Rome from the Death of Antoninus Pius to the Death of Severus Alexander* (London, 1701), unpaginated epistle dedicatory.

which George I, then Electoral Prince of Hanover, read in English.⁴⁸ Having trusted the instructing capacity of the Roman emperors' lives, Wotton invested the majority of his labor in the eras of "Marcus (Aurelius) and Commodus, and of Elagabalus and Alexander" on the grounds that "a very bad prince who immediately succeeded a very good one; and a most extraordinary prince, who came after one of the most profligate of man" must have displayed the most appropriate lessons for the Electoral Prince.⁴⁹

Laurence Echard's (1670–1730) *The Roman History from the Building of the City to the Perfect Settlement of the Empire by August Caesar* in five volumes followed Wotton's work in 1707. Although Echard had previously published the first two volumes separately, it was in 1707 that the five-volume form appeared for the first time. Nevertheless, despite the appearance of all five under his name, only the first two volumes were written by Echard himself. His history, too, included a "variety of extraordinary examples, proper for the instruction of princes" and was dedicated to Prince William, Duke of Gloucester. Echard was a historian committed to exhibiting meticulously the virtue of Roman imperialism with a particular emphasis on the Augustan era. His work, however, was criticized by Nathaniel Hooke (d. 1763), the author of the next Roman history to appear in Britain, as "too dry, too brief and unsatisfactory."⁵⁰

Hooke's *Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*, dedicated to his friend, the famous poet Alexander Pope, was published in 1738 and gained him substantial fame as a historian of Rome. Unlike his predecessors, he laid emphasis on "the civil affairs of Romans, and the revolutions in their government" rather than wars. Nevertheless, despite all his claims to perfection, Hooke loaded his work with tedious footnotes and massive extracts from Cicero. Also, his views on the senate were found very controversial and challenged by Conyer Middleton's *Treatise on the Roman Senate* (1747) and Thomas Chapman's *Essay on the Roman Senate* (1750). Still, Hooke's history received well-deserved recognition for his meticulous source analysis and "his championing of Livy over the previously more trusted Dionysius of Halicarnasus."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Wotton, "Biographical Notice", British Library MSS ADD 4224, f^o. 158.

⁴⁹ Wotton, *History of Rome*, unpaginated preface.

⁵⁰ N. Hooke, *The Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth* (London, 1738), I, unpaginated preface.

⁵¹ Gareth Sampson, 'The Rise and Fall of the Roman Historian: The Eighteenth Century in the Roman Historical Tradition' in James Moore, Ian Macgregor Morris and Andrew J.

Between Hooke's work and Thomas Blackwell's renowned *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus* (1753), a rather insignificant history by John Lockman (1698–1771) was published in 1740 in the form of questions and answers, principally designed for young people. This text, which was rather an endeavor to simplify the heavily erudite Roman histories, was superseded by Blackwell's remarkable account of the Augustan age and was thus forgotten.⁵² Blackwell (1701–1757) published the first two volumes of the *Memoirs*, which became one of the most read and discussed Roman histories of eighteenth-century Britain. He placed his focus, similar to his successor Gibbon, on the notion of decline, as he ventured to “show by what steps a brave and free people, from being the conquerors of the western world, came first to forfeit their liberties, and, by degrees, sunk into slavery, and become the meanest of mankind.” Having done so, he considered himself engaged in philosophical history, which was, in his words, the “difficult science of men.”⁵³ Through his court-Whig idealization of the republican era, Blackwell aspired to prove that if they gave up on their liberties, the British, too, could end up as “the meanest of mankind.”

The less influential third volume of the *Memoirs*, based on Blackwell's notes, was written by John Mills (1717–1786) and published in 1763. Though an author principally on agriculture, Mills undertook this duty to serve the happiness of his nation, which depended on the governors “whose manners the people are rather more ready to imitate than to obey their commands.”⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, Mills' involvement in Roman history-writing should not be discarded as trivial. Territorial expansion, landscape rehabilitation and biological, ecological, and botanical interaction and advancement in agriculture were imperative in the empire-building process and, to some, the ideal man at the service of empire was the Roman type of “the farmer-statesman.” Agriculture, therefore, was not a topic out of imperial discussions, since acquiring the scientific knowledge of “nature's government” would have taught ways of creating self-sufficient and prosperous colonies.⁵⁵

Bayliss (eds), *Reinventing History: The Enlightenment Origins of Ancient History* (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2008), p. 204.

⁵² [J. Lockman], *A New Roman History by Question and Answer* (London, 1760), p. iii.

⁵³ Thomas Blackwell, *Memoirs of the Courts of Augustus* (Edinburgh, 1753), I, pp. 4 and 5. It should be noted here that the less influential third volume of the *Memoirs*, based on Blackwell's notes, was written by John Mills (1717–1786).

⁵⁴ Blackwell [John Mills], *Memoirs of Augustus*, III, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government Science, Imperial Britain and the Improvement of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. xv and 50.

In 1759, Edward Wortley Montagu (1713–1777) published his *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Republics*. This work did include very useful insights into the Roman and Greek histories, particularly in reference to the rules of colonization, but since it was rather an opinion piece and not properly a history text, it is not relevant to the present study. To return to history texts in the proper sense of the word, next to appear on the publishing scene was Oliver Goldsmith's (1730–1774) *The Roman History from the Foundation of the City of Rome to the Destruction of the Western Empire* in 1769. Goldsmith, who was influenced by “a non-religious but somewhat high prerogative Tory tradition,”⁵⁶ became one of the most popular authors of his age. Although his colleagues generally looked down on him as a hack writer, he was rather comfortable with this image and did not claim “discoveries,” or to “offer anything... which has not been often anticipated by others.” In his Roman history, he underlined that he simply aimed “to supply a concise, plain, and unaffected narrative of the rise and decline of a well known empire” and not to tire his reader like the “many dull men” of his time.⁵⁷ One of the most apparent characteristics of this history was that it reflected Augustus in an extremely positive light; Goldsmith was among the men who created the literary cult of Augustus in the eighteenth century.

Interestingly, Goldsmith's assessment of Rome's decline, which evidently predates that of Gibbon, drew attention to Christianity as a progress-slowng factor. His non-religious stance gave him the liberty to explain the disarray by the supposed decaying effect of a state religion on the free spirit of human beings. Although Gibbon's similar assessment of Christianity alone is considered as so groundbreaking as to “permanently alter the study of Roman history,”⁵⁸ Goldsmith, who had elaborated on the same point before him, continued to be remembered as a hack writer. Emancipation from religion for the sake of progress was not an uncommon ideal among enlightened minds, and Goldsmith argued for it.

Finally, following the publication of the anonymous *Roman History in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* (1774) in two volumes, Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) published his *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* in 1783, with a dedication to the king. Ferguson believed that in his age “a just representation, of the military conduct and

⁵⁶ James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain 1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 122.

⁵⁷ Goldsmith, *Roman History*, I, unpaginated preface.

⁵⁸ O'Connor, *Irish Theologian*, 22.

political experience" of Rome that was "simple and unambitious of ornament" was still lacking in Roman history writing. To know Roman history well was "to know mankind; and to have seen our species under the fairest aspect of great ability, integrity and courage."⁵⁹ For these reasons, Ferguson engaged in Roman history and the success of his volume was such that it eventually superseded that of Hooke. His Whiggish account of Augustus, however, stands out as the most hostile, as it denigrated the emperor for bringing the Roman Republic to an end. Also, as a philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, he was preoccupied with the question of progress and the stages through which a state could evolve, and his work reflected this particular concern. Although his history was in the course of time forgotten and his other works, such as the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), received considerably more attention from the next generation of scholars, the former piece was one of the most philosophical history texts of his age and offers valuable insight for our research.

Ferguson's Roman history was the last prominent example of its sort in eighteenth-century Britain. As the British political interest had begun to lean towards debates on democracy, the history of ancient Greece would have gradually appeared to be "a more useful polemical device" than that of Rome.⁶⁰ In the following section, I concentrate on the contemporary matters of empire that inspired the historians to guide the political nation by means of examples from Roman history.

Contemporary Matters of Empire

Roman historiography, once having proceeded beyond the more common themes of the earlier centuries such as the antiquarian lists, problems of dark ages' chronology, and the mythological bits, succeeded in incorporating scholarly methodology and good narrative with the critical approach of the eighteenth-century philosophical history. The insights of Rome highlighted by historians, and often "with visible anxiety," were provided "as diagnoses of contemporary predicaments and malaises."⁶¹ The historians

⁵⁹ Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (London, 1783), I, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Frank M. Turner, 'British Politics and the Demise of the Roman Republic,' *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), p. 587. Also see C.A. Ataç, 'Imperial Lessons from Athens and Sparta: Eighteenth-Century British Histories of Ancient Greece,' *History of Political Thought*, 27(2006), pp. 642–660.

⁶¹ Burrow, *History of Histories*, p. xviii.

sought to offer answers to the heated debates of contemporary politics through their narratives of the Roman past. Those answers should matter to the students of political history as well as those of historiography. Some of the Roman histories of eighteenth-century Britain have been assessed from the perspectives of the American crisis and French Revolution, but they have not been considered by the Imperial Studies as normative texts displaying contemporary norms of empire.⁶²

The first British Empire, whose turbulent affairs were of a great concern to our historians, represented Protestantism, maritime power, commerce, non-aggressive settlements, and political liberties. The contemporary notion of the Catholic empire, associated with universal monarchy and conquest, stood for its anti-thesis. Despite the incessant discussions over the conquest of Ireland, the purported character of the British Empire was not in compliance with the ideal of conquest. Britain had been the archenemy of the universalist empires in Europe and refused to resort to conquest, which was the universalist way of expansion. When Britain's territorial expansion resulted in a foreign policy strategy in the eighteenth century, the British statesmen's cautious discourse encouraged the public to see their nascent empire as "a protectorate of several interests" rather than "a universal state."⁶³ A universal empire would have engaged in a constant attempt at legitimizing and securing its conquests, which were, in the words of an eighteenth-century pamphleteer, "usually as burthensome as dishonorable to the conquered" and "seldom of longer continuance."⁶⁴ In order not to assume the unnecessary burden of legitimizing and preserving the overstretched territorial acquisition, Britain sought to limit spatial expansion. Accordingly, as an exceptionally grand sea power, it also chose not to conquer but to expand through the binding force of commerce. In the meantime, the political debaters, thinkers, and historians delved into the sources comparing the imperial practices of the French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch Empires as well as those of the empires of antiquity.

The eighteenth-century British perception of empire, as Kathleen Wilson aptly puts it, was the outcome of "many systems and ideas, linked to each other through often disparate bonds of identity experience and practice," rooted and evolved in the Isles throughout centuries. Nevertheless,

⁶² See Sampson, 'Rise and Fall of the Roman Historian,' p. 187.

⁶³ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France 1500–1800* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 127.

⁶⁴ Anon., *A Discourse upon the Uniting Scotland with England* (London, 1702), p. 21.

the present scope requires us to delimit our definitions and focus on eighteenth-century meanings. The term 'British Empire' that denoted Great Britain and the colonies together then began to be employed in the pamphlets on the political, economic, and military affairs. One of the first uses appeared in an eccentric pamphlet by a Scotsman, Samuel Vetch, who was demanding assistance for expansion across Canada, which would have been to the advantage of the British Empire.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it was above all John Oldmixon's widely read survey of the British plantations, which introduced the British Empire to the British public. Oldmixon, an imperial topographer, successfully attracted the public's attention to transatlantic affairs by his *The British Empire in America*, which was published in 1708, immediately after the Anglo-Scottish Union. His conception of empire, in parallel with the commonplace of the age, was principally commercial, as he argued that the English needed this commercial empire, because they were the "inhabitants of an island," and the only way to make themselves "considerable in the world" was the fleets and trade. One of the main criticisms, at the time, against the American colonies was the possibility of their "draining England of her people." Oldmixon used ancient history to prove that the prominent ancient civilizations had sought being "entirely masters at the sea" and "never ceased till they were so at land also."⁶⁶

In the name of maintaining the balance of power, from 1689 to 1763, Britain waged costly continental wars. The Nine Years War (1689–97), the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–14), the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–48) and the Seven Years War (1756–63) exhausted the military and financial sources of Britain that could have been employed better to strengthen the commercial bond between the metropolis and the colonies. Till the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), this ideal of maintaining the balance of power remained at the core of the British political discourse. Even in the 1740s, when opposing voices began to be heard criticizing British engagement in European affairs, the Whig pamphleteers were still attempting to convince the nation that "our figure abroad must depend upon our holding the balance of power, and being at the head of that interest which opposes universal monarchy."⁶⁷ Nevertheless from the 1740s on, the opposition had begun to emphasize that the ideal of a balance of power was not compatible with the commercial and maritime

⁶⁵ Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 78.

⁶⁶ John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708), pp. xxi and xxxvii.

⁶⁷ Anon., *Observations on the Conduct of Great Britain in Respect to Foreign Affairs* (London, 1742), p. 12.

character of the British Empire. As stated in a pamphlet, because of this “fatal pretext,” Britain was “excluded from the interests of the empire;” and because “opportunity seldom makes second offers after the first are refused,” it should have taken the necessary measures to promote its overseas trade and to maintain its maritime power.⁶⁸

Such disillusionment with the Whiggish rhetoric of the balance of power made its way into the political pamphlets before the Seven Years’ War. Lord Bolingbroke’s *Idea of a Patriot King* (1738), was widely accepted as a significant work in the sense of creating a public awareness of what the primary duty of a British monarch ought to be. The British engagement in continental affairs had remained the greatest concern of the Hanoverian kings of Britain and this design sadly wasted the financial and human resources that could have been invested in a better management of domestic and colonial affairs. Bolingbroke even cautioned that such engagement could have resulted in Britain’s degradation to a province in a European confederacy. In this way, *Patriot King* served as one of the “hymns to blue-water patriotism.”⁶⁹

Because the British public began to question whether the Hanoverian kings put the priorities of Britain ahead of those of Hanover and the cost of the foreign troops deployed by the British army was absolutely necessary, the blue water policy gradually replaced the ideal of balance of power. Blue water was based on the Tory notion about Britain that a sea power should not be involved in land wars. The resignation of the Duke of Newcastle in 1756, the principal upholder of the notion of a balance of power, could be taken as a notable sign of this change. Becoming a partner in William Pitt’s second ministry in the following year, Newcastle, too, pursued the blue-water war strategy against France, together with Pitt.⁷⁰ Thus, the Tory emphasis on Britain’s natural and historical supremacy on the seas was eventually embraced by the Whigs, as Toryism was soon to cease to represent “a coherent creed.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ [T.W.] *The Natural Interest of Great Britain in its Present Circumstances. Demonstrated in a Discourse in Two Parts* (London, 1749), pp. 16 and 63.

⁶⁹ David Armitage, ‘The British Conception of Empire in the Eighteenth Century’ in Armitage (ed.) *Greater Britain 1516–1776: Essays in Atlantic History* (Aldershot & Vermont: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), p. 106.

⁷⁰ Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: The University of North Carolina, 2000), pp. 51–2.

⁷¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 357.

According to Niall Ferguson, “[t]he Seven Years War was the nearest thing the eighteenth century had to a world war.”⁷² The blue-water policy prescribed throughout the Seven Years War posited the overseas expeditions as “the most efficient and cost-effective way” to neutralize the French threat.⁷³ At the Peace of Paris in 1763, Britain acquired vast lands of Canada and Florida in return for leaving Guadeloupe to France and Havana to Spain. This treaty stands for Britain’s growing interest in and conscious commitment to its imperial affairs, because only then the idea of the incorporation of all the British territories in North America into the British Empire became a commonplace in the Isles. Within this context, the American affairs were among the most fashionable topics of the age. From the early 1760s, for example, a great number of newspapers, magazines and journals started to include a separate section on the British plantations in America, a practice which boosted up their circulation considerably. As Nancy F. Kohen notes, in 1760, 9.4 million newspaper stamps were issued, whereas this figure had been 7 million ten years before. Such an increase in the circulation of newspapers should testify to the increase in the popularity of the stories and comments about overseas issues published in those newspapers.⁷⁴ Equally, there was an increase in the number of political pamphlets in favor of this unprecedented territorial expansion, against those advocating the British mission of maintaining the European balance of power. The main concern expressed in these pamphlets was to find the best way of governing the colonies. It appeared in the form of a call for a union of the colonies “to oblige them to act jointly, and for the good of the whole.”⁷⁵

Despite the divergence in their implementations, the colonial laws did not essentially differ from one colony to another. Nevertheless, further steps were needed to cure the anomalies embedded in the governance of the colonies and homogenize their legislation. Discussions concentrated on issues such as whether the colonies had the right to be “proper judges in their own case”⁷⁶ or whether central taxation was required to connect the periphery to the metropolis. The colonies’ claim to “a distinct,

⁷² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 34.

⁷³ Gould, *Persistence of Empire*, p. 37.

⁷⁴ Nancy F. Kohen, *The Power of Commerce: Economy and Governance in the First British Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 177–8.

⁷⁵ Anon., *Proposals for Uniting the English Colonies on the Continent of America* (London, 1757), p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

legislative authority based on colonial charters" had been, though on and off, one of the items on the political agenda since 1734.⁷⁷ In order to prevent their autonomy, London had issued specific regulations such as the Currency Act of 1764, which introduced restrictions on the emission of paper money, the American Mutiny Act of 1765, which was designed to apply a single military code in the colonies, and the well-known Sugar Act of 1764 and Stamp Act of 1765. When, as the final attempt at centralizing and legislating, Westminster took action to declare the colonies dependent on the Crown and the Parliament of Great Britain through the Declaratory Act of 1766, the colonies destroyed the illusion depicting them as the subjects of the King's *imperium*.

The first British Empire, in James Muldoon's words, remained "an empire in search of a theory to justify it and a constitutional structure to incarnate it."⁷⁸ In their first empire, the British did not succeed in fully establishing a political, legislative and commercial union between the colonies and motherland. Throughout the eighteenth century, the popular perception of empire constantly shifted from the cautious, secure and trading empire to the daring, expansionist and costly one. From the late 1740s, the latter took over the "mitigated" attitude "against unbridled enthusiasm for building a vast territorial empire." Nevertheless, the problematic years of the late 1770s once again triggered the apprehension that Britain, by annexing new lands so distant from it, may have ended up "overextending the human and financial resources of the nation" like the continental powers did in the previous century.⁷⁹ When the first empire ended in 1783 consequent to the loss of the thirteen colonies, it became apparent in the eyes of many that, as one pamphleteer concluded, Britain should have instead enjoyed "all the pristine benefits of America; without the expense of keeping it."⁸⁰

Following the loss of the thirteen colonies, the imperial discourse shifted to an "increasingly authoritarian and more conspicuously territorial"⁸¹ one.

⁷⁷ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 170.

⁷⁸ James Muldoon, *Empire and Order: The Concept of Empire 800–1800* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 138.

⁷⁹ Philip Lawson, "'Arts and Empire Equally Extend': Tradition, Prejudice and Assumption in the Eighteenth Century Press Coverage of Empire" in Lawson (ed.) *A Taste for Empire and Glory: Studies in British Overseas Expansion* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1997), p. 138.

⁸⁰ Edward Stratford, *An Essay on the True Interests and Resources of the Empire of the King of Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1783), pp. 18 and 20.

⁸¹ Armitage, 'British Conception of Empire,' p. 106.

India, St. Lucia, Ceylon, Malaya, South Africa and Quebec under the second British Empire were governed in accordance with this new conception of empire. Our historians of Rome did not take great interest in the affairs of the second empire. As will be seen in the next section, the topic of North America was what preoccupied them. During the first empire, Britain failed to arrive at a definite imperial policy but remained in a constant search for one. In this imperial search, the British were troubled by notions such as sovereignty, depopulation, overstretching territory, maritime supremacy, commerce, liberties, conquest, settlements, and the role of religion. To find precise answers to these questions, the historians studied the previous imperial experiences of both the modern European powers and the ancient civilizations. In the following section, I elaborate on some of the answers that they came up with.

Lessons of Empire from Roman Historiography

In his 'The Tory View of Roman History,' Addison Ward underlines that Roman histories of the eighteenth century were examined only to judge whether they reflected "a Whig or Republican view" of Rome.⁸² Although these texts mostly dwelt on the glorification of the Roman Senate and the promotion of liberty and virtue, not all of them exhibited a republican reading of Roman history. There were also histories written by authors with Tory tendencies such as those by Echard, Hooke and Goldsmith. Therefore, it is not apt to categorize eighteenth-century Roman history-writing as simply republican. Alongside the comments on the republican tenets such as civic liberty, political representation and moderation, different views on the ideal sort of empire, too, pervaded those texts. After all, mixed constitutions and liberties were not the only tenets held in common by Rome and Britain. Their imperial existence and quest for justification were equally important elements in the close analogy drawn between them. Britain, ironically once "the peripheral country" within the Roman Empire and thought by Virgil as "cut-off from the world," then stood tall as a rising colonial power similar to that of Rome.⁸³

⁸² Addison Ward, 'The Tory View of Roman History,' *Studies in English Literature*, 4 (1964), p. 413.

⁸³ Norman Vance, 'Imperial Rome and Britain's Language of Empire 1600–1837,' *History of European Ideas*, 26 (2000), 212.

Although the British historians of Rome, with the exception of Thomas Blackwell, did not directly address the British nation anywhere in their works other than in the prefaces, and avoided explicit association with Britain, they committed to the emulative and guiding mission attributed to history, intending to transmit subtle lessons of empire through their accounts of Rome. Their inclination to present Roman history as accessible in its entirety enabled them to extract political instructions and moral lessons even from the reign of Romulus. Despite the dark and unclear points it may have contained, knowing early Roman history was crucial to showing when Roman greatness began to be visible and to what the Romans owed their rise and progress. Historians' conviction suggested that the essential features of the Roman Empire had already appeared in the rude period of Rome. According to Laurence Echard, by studying the first Romans, the reader would appreciate the fact that from the beginning "they fought for dominion, but not for tyranny, and chose rather to be loved than feared" and "this made the provinces cheerful in their submission, hearty in their contributions, and unwavering in their obedience."⁸⁴

Without having dwelt further on the unknown of those dark ages, the historians proceeded towards the better-documented episodes of Roman history by the help of comparisons between good bad princes. Since 'mirror for a prince' was still a common literary genre in the eighteenth century, historians made generous use of it in their works. Through their Plutarchian analyses of characters and conducts, words and deeds, they sought to educate the present and future monarchs to be good for the sake of the state and the people. As Linda Colley points out, from the "immediate euphoria" of the Restoration to most of the eighteenth century, the English or British monarchs did not come to be seen as "an unquestioned cynosure for national sentiment." There was always a shortcoming in the public image of these monarchs, which prevented their full identification with the good prince who would win over the entire British population. This "intermittent, uncertain quality of the monarchy's public presentation and appeal,"⁸⁵ in fact, encouraged the literati to assume the responsibility of providing these monarchs with the guidelines of transforming themselves into the most virtuous princes in history.⁸⁶ Therefore, it is no

⁸⁴ Echard, *Roman History*, III, p. 170.

⁸⁵ Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation,' *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), 95.

⁸⁶ For an extensive coverage of the mirrors-for-princes in eighteenth-century Britain, please see David Armitage, 'A Patriot for Whom?,' pp. 401 n. 17, 404 and 407.

coincidence that the majority of the Roman history texts of the eighteenth century appeared during the reigns of George I and George II who, due to their German origin, seemed to be desperately in need of such wise guidance.

In Oliver Goldsmith's words, the characters of the Roman emperors "have been intimately connected with the history of the state, and its rise or decline might have been said to depend on the virtues and vices, the wisdom or the indolence of those who governed it."⁸⁷ For this reason, it appeared extremely important to analyze the events in Roman history with reference to the character and the ruling capacity of the monarchs and emperors. To William Wotton, for instance, being the head of "so vast an empire as that of Rome" was "a laborious employment [requiring] abundance of thought, and great application to do it." A good emperor, who alone could have maintained "the necessary state and order" of an empire, would have needed "a well-governed court" under these circumstances. According to the author who wrote under the pseudonym Nobleman, the good prince, like Numa Pompilius, was the one who issued the laws worthy of "the approbation of the public" and who did not rule "at the expense of fellow-citizens, trampling on their laws, liberties, privileges, and the whole of their constitution in government."⁸⁸

The historians, who provided contesting views of Augustus in their works, did not disagree on Marcus Aurelius, universally portraying him as an adored emperor. He ruled the empire in "absolute peace"⁸⁹ and by "excellent learning, regulated by judgment and prudence."⁹⁰ Till the reign of Commodus, the glorious Antonine dynasty managed capably

the different interests of the several provinces, and many times of different cities in the same province; the numberless grievances of such divided nations, which must all be redressed by one single person; with a world of other difficulties.⁹¹

And Marcus Aurelius represented the best kind among the good Antonine emperors. When compared with the bad emperors such as Tiberius, Caligula, and of course Commodus, his qualities stood out even more.

⁸⁷ Goldsmith, *Roman History*, II, 492.

⁸⁸ *The History of Modern Europe with an Account of Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and a View of the Progress of Society from the Fifth to the Eighteenth Century in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* (Dublin, 1779), I, pp. 12–3.

⁸⁹ Wotton, *History of Rome*, p. 245.

⁹⁰ *Nobleman's Account of Roman Empire*, II, p. 200.

⁹¹ Wotton, *History of Rome*, pp. 24–5.

Inclination towards luxury and tyranny was what made an emperor bad. Because territorial expansion was accompanied by an increase of wealth and by “a thousand vicious methods of exhausting it,” rulers in times of expansion were especially challenged by luxury and corruption. As will be elaborated later, luxury was believed to lead to “aversion to business”; an emperor, who was “regardless of his people in all his actions,” sank into this corruptive power.⁹² The Roman rulers were contaminated by luxury subsequent to the fall of Carthage.

Alongside the Plutarchian accounts of the Roman emperors’ characters, Carthage was equally of utility to our historians. As such, the Roman encounter with the Carthaginians and the three Punic wars were essential to recounting the glorious story of Rome that was growing into a world empire. The Carthaginian commonwealth had become a matter of admiration among the Romans with its “dominions extending about 2000 miles in length, all bordering about the sea.”⁹³ For the British historians, too, the maritime character of this commercial empire deserved much admiration. Nevertheless, Carthage was purely commercial and, in that sense, not solid. The Roman Empire, like eighteenth-century Britain, possessed the militaristic means to safeguard its commercial existence through a formidable army homogeneously made up of citizens of Rome.⁹⁴ Such a benefit the Carthaginians were obviously deprived of, given their less warlike army of foreign mercenaries from Gaul, Spain, and Africa.⁹⁵ The British, like the imperial Romans and unlike the Carthaginians, should remain as “a nation of patriots and merchants.”⁹⁶ For the sake of commercial superiority, they should be able to take on arms, when the time came. The history of Carthage, on this account, was the history of “a republic of merchants, who understood the value of money, but not the merit of brave soldiers.”⁹⁷

The comparison of Rome and Carthage enabled our historians to reassess the virtue of commerce over conquest, naval power over land force, and a national army over foreign auxiliaries, which were topics never absent from the British political agenda. Basil Kennet, for instance, praised Rome’s less impressive commercial and naval skills, overshadowed

⁹² Wotton, *History of Rome*, pp. 245–6.

⁹³ Echard, *Roman History*, I, p. 181.

⁹⁴ Hooke, *Roman History*, II, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Hooke, *Roman History*, II, p. 67 and Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, p. 101.

⁹⁶ Lord Bolingbroke quoted in James H. Bunn, ‘The Tory View of Geography,’ *boundary* 2 (1979), p. 157.

⁹⁷ Hooke, *Roman History*, II, p. 66.

by those of Carthage, as the sign of "primitive innocence and integrity," which were "free from all those corruptions that an intercourse with foreigners might probably have brought into fashion."⁹⁸ By making use of Rome and Carthage, Kennet here echoed the Platonic understanding of corruption through contact with foreigners. Thus Carthage appeared to be a convenient example to examine the problems such as the corrupting power of luxury, luxurious commerce, and contact with foreigners. A great flow of wealth to the country obtained by trade caused the Carthaginians to be effeminate and deprived of valor.⁹⁹ This effeminacy spread to every aspect of life in empire and, in particular, into the military, playing the decisive role in the fall of Carthage. Effeminacy was a frequently used term in the eighteenth-century political and philosophical texts connoting materialism, selfishness, corruption, and relaxed manners.¹⁰⁰

Carthage was "the rival state, whose destruction alone could establish the Roman greatness"¹⁰¹ and therefore, following its defeat in the third Punic war, Rome was left without a rival. From then on, Goldsmith similarly argued, Rome was transformed into a mighty, extensive, and wealthy empire, gracious to its citizens and most formidable to the enemies. Nevertheless, this was also the time when it became "a powerful state, giving admission to all the vices that tend to divide, enslave, and at last totally destroy it." As the riches from Carthage and other newly-acquired colonies continued to flow to the empire, the Romans could not have escaped from the fate of the Carthaginians. Their manners had also been softened and corrupted. Although the empire did not cease to expand, only the name of Rome grew, not its strength.¹⁰² In the pages devoted to exhibit the fatal side-effects of luxury, Sallust, Livy, and Plutarch were made great use of by the historians. They cited Cato, politician and statesman in the late Roman republic, as the historical character the most immune from all the vices including luxury, and Augustus as the emperor whose rule sustained the miraculous but temporary cure for luxury.¹⁰³

Beside luxury, territorial expansion greatly preoccupied the British historians, who lived in the times when the debates over the thirteen colonies

⁹⁸ Kennet, *Roma Antique*, p. 232.

⁹⁹ *Nobleman's Account of Roman Empire*, I, p. 231.

¹⁰⁰ Richard B. Sher, 'Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and the Problem of National Defence,' *Journal of Modern History*, 61(1989), p. 243.

¹⁰¹ Hooke, *Roman History*, II, n. 66.

¹⁰² Goldsmith, *Roman History*, II, p. 311. Also Blackwell, *Augustus*, I, p. 82.

¹⁰³ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, II, p. 547, Hooke, *Roman History*, I, pp. 296, 299 and 377 and Goldsmith, *Roman History*, I, p. 330 and II, p. 16.

dominated the political agenda. What methods were to be employed in the successful pursuit of expansion? On what basis could this expansion be justified and how were the new acquisitions to be presented? These were the questions for which the historians sought to provide answers in the lack of a “consistent ideology around which to gather and by which to be identified,”¹⁰⁴ when it came to the imperial affairs. Fortunately, Roman history promised a limitless analogy as an alternative.

According to Laurence Echard, it was crucial to recognize the point that the Romans at the outset engaged only in the wars that were “all defensive, or at least, not begun without just grounds and provocations.”¹⁰⁵ And expansion was simply the inevitable outcome of the victories at the end of these just, defensive wars. With this emphasis, Echard aimed to leave out the negative implications of spatial expansion and thus to vindicate the acquisition of territories that belonged to other peoples. Because expansion involved the usurpation of the sovereign rights of the conquered and never ceased to be a delicate and controversial matter, the territorial connotations of imperial affairs were treated with considerable reserve in Britain. Once the distance between the centre and periphery undeniably increased, it was no longer sufficient to refer to defensive, just wars. Such was the case for the Roman Empire in its heyday and the British historians had to confront the problem. Nathaniel Hooke stressed that the Roman Empire, subsequent to the banishment of the Tarquins, “put the Romans in a condition of usurping an authority over other nations, the most inconsiderable of which had an extent of country far exceeding theirs.”¹⁰⁶ Adam Ferguson would have seconded this thought by stressing that “no state has a right to make the submission of mankind a necessary condition to its own preservation.”¹⁰⁷

What then was so glorious about the history of the Roman Empire and what possible lessons could be taken from it, if Rome was a usurper state? At this point, Ferguson again tackled the problematic of expanding without usurping by claiming that “some part of this political character, however, is necessary to the safety, as well as to the advancement of nations.” Therefore, a state, though not “many states qualified to support such pretensions” could pursue expansionist policies in the name of progress and security. Such an exceptional state could not have allowed “any ally to

¹⁰⁴ Bunn, ‘Tory View,’ 162. Also see Armitage, ‘British Conception of Empire,’ pp. 97–99.

¹⁰⁵ Echard, *Roman History*, I, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ Hooke, *Roman History*, I, p. 128.

¹⁰⁷ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, p. 275.

suffer by having espoused its cause.”¹⁰⁸ Within this context, the demographic implications of territorial expansion received particular attention, since the demographic growth superseding the territorial was seen as the future “main strength” of such an exceptional state.¹⁰⁹ Hooke’s emphasis on demography intended to respond to eighteenth-century concerns about the demographic weakness of Britain, which is discussed extensively in Colley’s *Captives*. The possibility of the depopulation of Britain as a consequence of territorial expansion considerably troubled those eighteenth-century minds, who viewed the depopulation of the motherland as the main reason behind the decline of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The sort of expansion that would not depopulate the motherland and stimulate a population flow from the periphery to the center was desirable. The Romans had pursued such a strategy and thrived.

Arriving at a definition of the ideal type of conquest appeared to be equally crucial, for, though being an inevitable aspect of expansion, not all types were desirable. Inspired by Livy, Hooke contended that Servius Tullus “rated the value of his conquests only by their tendency to the public good.” In the early Hanoverian era, the political men of Tory origin and some court Whigs were extremely disturbed by the thought that in their plans of war and expansion—discussed in the previous section—the Hanoverian monarchs did not take the public good as a matter of importance. As a Jacobite, Hooke elaborated on this point in order to gain a chance to extend his criticism to the king. He thus suggested that expansion was not to be a priority but improving the public good certainly was.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Ferguson and Blackwell, too, highlighted that the Romans acted within the limits of their constitution, above all, for the common benefit of the Roman people.¹¹¹ Conquests were ventures in which the Romans took into consideration not only the welfare of the Roman people but the differing conditions of the conquered.

Preserving the new colonies was as important as acquiring them and the British historians of Rome treated the topics of making conquests and preserving territorial acquisitions separately. More emphasis was laid on the means to preserve the newly acquired lands incorporated into the

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, p. 276.

¹⁰⁹ Hooke, *Roman History*, I, p. 127.

¹¹⁰ Hooke, *Roman History*, I, p. 102.

¹¹¹ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, p. 276 and Blackwell, *Augustus*, I, p. 100. With the exception of the ‘Nobleman’ no historian adopted a critical approach to the Roman way of expansion. *Nobleman’s Account of Roman Empire*, I, p. 296.

empire, for there was “nothing so slippery as a new conquest.” Having been aware of this fact, Rome impressively preserved its colonies, since it was “no upstart state—no favorite of fortune, of a sudden growth and as sudden decay.”¹¹² By wisely implementing a flexible colonial policy, it gradually grew and successfully incorporated the newly acquired lands into its empire.

Though published earlier than the other books and therefore belonging to an earlier generation of history-writing, Kennet’s Roman history provided rich possibilities for the unification of the English colonies in North America with the metropolis by displaying how the Romans attached their colonies to Rome. In his work, Kennet, believing that the diversity of the Roman imperial administration had been neglected, stressed the importance of several forms of government that the Romans established in their conquests. They were “very well worth our knowledge,” but were “seldom rightly distinguished.”¹¹³ Here, it should be stressed that although he may have fallen out of philosophical historiography of Enlightenment, Kennet’s assessment of varying colonial administration within the Roman Empire could not have been superseded by the next generation of historians. While the others examined this system without taking the pain to name the differing administrative structures, Kennet elaborated on five types of government: colonies, *municipae*, the prefecture, federate *civitates*, and provinces. Thus, he aimed to shed light on the possible variations of settlement on the conquered lands and the relations between the conqueror and the conquered.

The type of government to be implemented within this context was determined by the attitude of the native people towards the Romans. Stronger measures were taken against the agitated communities, which were likely to trouble Rome in the future, whereas remarkable favors were granted to the more docile ones, which seemed to get along with the center obediently. Of the five forms, colonies, *municipae*, the prefecture and the federate *civitates* were modeled on the acquisitions in Italy. Provinces were to govern the distant foreign countries of larger extent. In the provinces, which consisted of multiple communities that inhabited extensive territories, it was impossible to encounter one single attitude towards the conqueror. Some of these communities were on more friendly terms and had “a desire of union and agreement,” while, naturally, others were

¹¹² Blackwell, *Augustus*, I, pp. 105 and 96.

¹¹³ Kennet, *Roma Antique*, p. 225.

troublesome and “unwilling to part with their liberty.” The latter were punished by heavy taxes and finally subdued under strict governors, who were appointed annually by Rome. Meanwhile, the cooperative provinces enjoyed a more flexible system of taxation to which, in some cases, no additional burden had been added since their conquest. Such a government in which the degree of subjection of the provinces was determined by their degree of loyalty enabled the Roman rulers to focus their attention and the military and financial resources of Rome on the problematic areas only.¹¹⁴

Though not as systematic as Kennet’s, Hooke’s approach also offered useful insight into the Roman method of expansion and called the attention of the British reader to the delicate balance to be maintained between the conqueror and conquered. In a similar light, he highlighted the point that not all subdued nations enjoyed the same privileges. On the basis of “the fidelity of the several cities and nations and the services they did the republic,” some were awarded a wide range of privileges, from retaining customs and laws of their own to the right of suffrage and citizenship. Flexibility, once again, came to the fore as the key to successful colonial policy. Nevertheless, in order to preserve the acquisitions and prevent the “ill consequences of . . . independence,” permanent colonists were needed.¹¹⁵ According to Blackwell, stability and permanence could be established by the hands of colonists who would desire to “win the hearts of the vanquished by bettering their condition” and not by “an armed force in the country, superior to natives.”¹¹⁶

The debates over the ideal imperial administration made inevitable references to the Augustan empire. Given the influential Augustan cult created in eighteenth-century Britain, the identification of the Georges with Augustus was a common practice among the literati. In this context, volumes of poetry, political pamphlets, and history books were published, each seeking to support the conviction that Britain stood on the eve of an Augustan era. Of course, an equal amount of literature, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, appeared also to dispute the undeserved glorification of Augustus or the Georges’ identification with him. All these elements made Augustus and his reign one of the fashionable

¹¹⁴ Kennet, *Roma Antique*, pp. 225–227.

¹¹⁵ Hooke, *Roman History*, I, pp. 604, 291 and 500.

¹¹⁶ Blackwell, *Augustus*, I, pp. 104–105.

topics of the age and the analyses of the Augustan way of empire-building enjoyed an extensive place in the Roman history texts.

When used in the positive sense, the word Augustan implied a “stable government, the arts of peace, protection by heaven, refinement of style and patronage of great authors.” At the utmost, it connoted a state of perfection in which the “civilizing forces of permanent achievements” emerged. In its negative sense, the Augustan regime was perceived as inducing a “nascent despotism” that would eventually destroy all the republican virtues.¹¹⁷ The pro-Augustan reading of Roman history was common among the historians of Tory tendency, whereas the negative reading was associated with the republican Whig camp. Nevertheless, although such categorization generally holds, it should also be stated that it is “liquid, not solid.”¹¹⁸ Hooke, for example, who wrote to challenge the republican interpretation of Roman history, exhibited an anti-Augustan stance, because the emperor was the murderer of Cicero.

The Tory camp of historians such as Goldsmith, Echard, and John Mills presented the reign of Augustus to their readers as a period of a miraculous convergence of all the ideal political, social and economic conditions, whereas the republican camp, including Ferguson and Wotton, severely condemned the same period as absolutist and tyrannical. Although it was under Trajan that the Roman Empire reached its largest extent, became most “formidable to the rest of the world”¹¹⁹ and thus spread “the Roman fame to a larger extent than ever,” he was never considered in the eighteenth century as an emperor equal to Augustus in greatness. Trajan exceeded the optimum point fixed by Augustus in terms of expansion. As history had taught, territorial expansion was such a delicate issue, and nations were to note the point at which to stop, rather than to pursue a limitless, uncontrolled acquisition of new lands. Trajan neglected this golden rule and thus after his death the Roman Empire gradually began “to sink by the unwieldiness of its bulk and the vastness of its own weight.”¹²⁰ Augustus, on the other hand, was exceptionally competent and wise in imperial affairs, as he limited the territorial expansion to the optimum point where the emperor could keep up peace, quiet, wealth, and

¹¹⁷ Howard D. Weinbrot, ‘History, Horace and Augustus Caesar: Some Implications for Eighteenth-Century Studies’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1974), pp. 391–395.

¹¹⁸ Northrop Frye, ‘Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Sensibility’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 24 (1990–1991), p. 160.

¹¹⁹ Goldsmith, *Roman History*, I, p. 336. Also, Echard, *Roman History*, II, p. 284.

¹²⁰ Echard, *Roman History*, II, p. 263.

happiness equally everywhere from the centre to the remotest corner of the empire.

Lex Regia, the law issued to transfer the legislative power of the Senate to the hands of Augustus, however, received severe criticism from the British historians. From the early modern era, *Lex Regia* came to be associated with absolute monarchy, and as in the example of the Danish King Frederick III (1648–1670) and the era of Kongeloven, and it provided a basis for absolutist constitutions. In the eyes of our anti-Augustan historians too, *Lex Regia* represented the archetype of the legal code that created one of the most despicable governments on earth—an absolutist monarchy. Ferguson, the fiercest opponent of Augustus, fervently argued that *Lex Regia*, which distorted the actual principle of laws as having replaced the people with an Augustus, had been designed simply “to guard *his* person, not only *his* safety and the authority of *his* government, but *his* most private concerns.”¹²¹ The pro-Augustan historians, on the other hand, did not deny the absolutist features of the Augustan government or contradict the argument that after him these features caused Rome to sink slowly and irretrievably into the worst form of tyranny. At the same time, however, they collectively aimed to justify Augustan absolutism as a measure necessary to rule the vast Roman Empire efficiently.¹²²

The Augustan empire, in Mills’s words, raised on “a mixed form of government” in which “Augustus’s mildness, his moderation, his beneficence” and “his virtues” embraced “every order of the state, public communities, as well as private persons, cities protected by the empire and the kings in the alliance of the Romans.”¹²³ As Echard contended, his absolutism disguised under the form of mixed government convinced the Romans that their empire was “indissoluble and immortal.”¹²⁴ What then could have been the recipe for achieving such a miraculous peace? Among the normative lessons to be reached, the British historians put particular emphasis on issues such as leaving religion untouched in the colonies, repopulating Italy, being cautious about expansion, building mutual intercourse between the center and periphery, uniting the colonies by alliances, and finally permitting the senate to govern the weak internal provinces of the

¹²¹ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, III, p. 509. Italics mine.

¹²² Echard, *Roman History*, I, p. 452, Goldsmith, *Roman History*, I, p. 119 and Mills, *Augustus*, III, p. 573.

¹²³ Mills, *Augustus*, III, pp. 555 and 447.

¹²⁴ Echard, *Roman History*, I, pp. 450–451.

empire.¹²⁵ Even Ferguson praised this “fabric of the empire.”¹²⁶ The truth of the matter is that Ferguson, never ceasing to be critical of Augustus for what he did to the perfect Roman republic, did not employ so severe a language on imperial issues. In this way, Ferguson distinguished between empire as regime and empire as entity and presented himself as anti-Augustan, but not anti-empire.

As one of the most known philosophical historians of the Scottish Enlightenment, Ferguson presented his ideas of empire in an impressively scientific manner in terms of historical accuracy, methodology, and categorizations. Adopting the progressive approach in his works he aimed to demonstrate how “the particular modes of government appropriate for one stage of development were inappropriate for others.”¹²⁷ It should not be surprising that Ferguson applied the same rule to his understanding of empire and assessed Roman history in terms of progressive stages. To him, the government of Rome first emerged as monarchy; it was then transformed into an aristocracy. Eventually it became a republic, as each time “a revolution” was needed “in order to preserve it in its former progressive state.”¹²⁸ Although one could here draw a parallelism between Machiavelli’s political thought and Ferguson’s presentation of the progressive road to empire, Ferguson’s Roman history bears no explicit reference to Machiavelli. The obvious resemblance must have been due to their common ancient inspirations such as Tacitus and Livy.¹²⁹ In other words, different regimes were progressively adopted in Rome according to their capacity for sustaining and governing an ever-expanding empire. Ferguson’s moral philosophy was grounded in the idea that any topic could be elaborated “from the point of view of the improvements of which it is capable.”¹³⁰ Such view represents one of the hallmarks of the Scottish Enlightenment; from this point of view Ferguson studied the topic of the Roman Empire.

¹²⁵ Echard, *Roman History*, I, p. 451 and II, p. 3, *Nobleman’s Account of Roman Empire*, II, p. 67, Mills, *Augustus*, III, p. 560

¹²⁶ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, III, p. 570.

¹²⁷ Turner, ‘British Politics,’ 584.

¹²⁸ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, p. 14.

¹²⁹ Lisa Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), p. 39. Hill argues that Machiavellian thought could have also been transferred to Ferguson through James Harrington, Bernard Mandeville and Montesquieu.

¹³⁰ Sher, ‘Ferguson and National Defense,’ p. 250.

Ferguson was unique among his contemporaries, who were rather inclined to focus on the issue of empire from the reign of Augustus onwards. Offering a Whig's republican reading of the Roman history, Ferguson laid particular emphasis on the republican era of Rome. It is indeed the case that during the republican era, Rome experienced grave internal disruptions; for the Senators were lost in shallow personal arguments and domestic peace and union remained in danger. However, Ferguson claimed that despite the internal upheavals, the Roman state secured its acquisitions and continued growing without "any signs of weakness in the foreign wars."¹³¹ Having met the criterion of securing territorial expansion, the republic proved to be appropriate and able to run an empire. Therefore, as subtly emphasized, Britain could have been at once a republic and an empire. When the Romans terminated the republic, this was not because of a regime malfunction. They, in fact, prematurely ended one of the stages of progress before the exhaustion of its capacity.

As Anthony Pagden highlights in his *Lords of All the World*, the term empire connoted three distinct meanings for the eighteenth century mind: sovereignty, one-man rule, and an expanding territorial entity.¹³² In his assessment of empire, Ferguson drew a distinction between 'empire' as a regime and 'empire' as a territorially expanding state. As regime, the imperial governance with its agents and institutions as well as the extended authority of the ruler was not looked on favorably. On the other hand, throughout the entire text, 'empire' as expanding territory through new acquisitions was regarded as desirable and was promoted. Among Ferguson's intellectual loyalties, neo-Stoicism had a prominent place and his preoccupation with the topics of empire such as order, universal norms, and fight against degeneration demonstrated this commitment well. His partiality to "the idea of cosmopolis and a universal siblinghood of rational souls" must have been the reason why he retained interest in empire as a progressing and bettering political force.¹³³ Although famous for "his many divided loyalties," Ferguson displayed shifting Stoic tendencies altering between wider cosmopolitanism and narrower parochialism. His appreciation of empire as an expanding entity resurfaced when he spoke "as a Stoic cosmopolite" and this, as Hill indicates, was often.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ferguson, *Roman Republic*, I, pp. 14, 27 and 48 and III, p. 324.

¹³² Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998), p. 17.

¹³³ Hill, *Passionate Society*, p. 39.

¹³⁴ Hill, *The Passionate Society*, p. 26.

Conclusion

James William Johnson complained in 1967 that “[i]n the last two hundred years, theories of historiography have taken the work of Gibbon as a starting point.”¹³⁵ Notwithstanding a few examples, such a tendency persists even today. This chapter has sought to break away from this tendency as well as to provide the complete list of ancient Roman histories of eighteenth-century Britain and elaborate on them, with the exception of Gibbon’s work, from the perspective of the historians’ politics. It has also striven to establish the importance of ancient Roman histories within the eighteenth-century literature on empire. The few scattered available analyses of these texts have concentrated only on the historians’ views on civic humanism, republican values, and democracy. Nevertheless, “history’s lofty ethical and instructive purpose”¹³⁶ was not confined to these topics; particularly ancient history was concerned with a much wider range of subjects. Within this context, empire was a recurrent theme. The historians approached the topic with the aim of participating in the ongoing debates over the British Empire, but in a more subtle way than the political pamphleteers. The historians’ mission was twofold: first to produce a well-researched and well-written ancient history and then to extend to the political nation their opinions on critical contemporary issues through the related experiences of the ancients. In the fulfilment of this mission, they avoided being explicit about the instructions which they saw fit to transmit.

To the British, empire had never been “a monochrome, predictable entity.”¹³⁷ Thus, they looked into a multitude of sources with the hope of finding guidance in the unknown path to imperial greatness. Eighteenth-century ancient history-writing offered insights into imperial matters such as expansion, colonial governance, commercial power, standing armies, the degree of interaction with natives and the fight against degeneration. The philosophical histories of Rome elucidated those topics of empire by means of Plutarchian biographies and a venerable literary genre, the ‘mirror of princes.’ Most strikingly, the historians of Rome made a clear distinction between empire as a constitutional arrangement and empire as a territorially extended state. A general distaste for empire as a

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Neo-Classical Thought*, p. 31.

¹³⁶ Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, p. 8.

¹³⁷ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600–1850* (London: J. Cape, 2002), p. 377.

constitutional arrangement permeated history texts, whereas empire as a territorially extended state was commonly considered desirable, even by those who wrote Roman history to glorify republican virtue. Interestingly enough, although all historians elaborated on the imperial practices of Rome, only Kennet and Ferguson seemed to attempt an understanding of the Roman Empire in the way it actually was. Kennet, the first historian of Rome in eighteenth-century Britain, and Ferguson, the last, examined meticulously the nature of Rome's imperial governance and all its administrative divisions. The historians in between failed to exhibit the same degree of scholarship while authentically reconstructing the Roman Empire.

The historians dealt with here put particular emphasis on the topic of empire with the conviction that genuine commitment to lessons learned from ancient history would create a durable empire on earth for the British nation. In doing so, they were often constrained by their sources. A superficial examination of our historians may often suggest simply a reworking of ancient statements. Nevertheless, when the normative intentions of eighteenth-century history-writing are taken into consideration, the Roman histories at hand appear to be more informative. The revelation of their authors' own political and other concerns, never explicitly stated, render these texts constantly interesting.

INDEX

- Alexander, William 334–335
 Allan, David 110
 Alocco-Bianco, Luciana 451
 Amyot, Jacques 138
 Anderson, James 312–314
 Angenot, Marc 389, 399
 Aristotle 11, 142, 233, 239, 380, 405, 408,
 422, 456, 465
 Arnauld, Antoine 238
 Arnot, Hugo 331
 Augustine 214, 222–224, 389
 Aurelius, Marcus 13, 383, 480, 491
- Bacon, Francis 64–65, 227, 235, 246, 402,
 404, 406–409, 418–419, 423, 436
 Badir, Magdy Gabriel 442
 Bayle, Pierre 13, 17, 19, 182, 252, 441, 460
 Behler, Ernst 190
 Below, Georg von 249
 Bentley, Michael 2
 Bentley, Richard 478
 Berville, Albin de 439–440
 Blackwell, Thomas 481, 490, 495, 497
 Blair, Hugh 108, 337
 Boece, Hector 311, 330
 Boeckh, August 300
 Bolingbroke, Henry St. John 17–18,
 67–69, 76, 83, 89, 472, 477, 486
 Bonald, Louis de 373, 386, 392–393, 396
 Bongie, Laurence 62
 Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne 10, 154,
 162–163, 172, 195, 202, 208, 211, 213, 288, 445
 Boswell, James 43, 338
 Bower, Alexander 113
 Boyle, Robert 97, 402, 407
 Brumfitt, John H. 160, 170
 Buchanan, George 311–314, 316, 330, 334
 Buchanan, John Lanne 339
 Buchez, Philippe 386, 390
 Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte
 de 16
 Burke, Edmund 8, 125, 371
 Burnet, Gilbert 351, 360, 479
 Burrow, John 162
 Burton, Robert 224
 Bury, J.B. 414
 Butterfield, Herbert 20, 343
- Calas, Jean 180–182, 384, 388
 Calderwood, David 312
 Calvin, John 269–270
 Camillo, Giulio 240
 Capaldi, Nicholas 62
 Carlyle, Alexander 108, 113
 Carte, Thomas 356–357, 370
 Cassirer, Ernst 1, 4, 190, 221
 Catherine II (The Great) 173, 176, 185
 Catrou, François 478–479
 Chapman, Thomas 480
 Charles I 63, 67, 75, 76, 91, 93, 94
 Charles II 94, 361, 478
 Charles XII 161, 170, 176
 Chateaubriand, François-René 373, 386,
 390–391, 394
 Châtelet, Marquise de 160, 163, 182
 Chladenius, Johann Martin 293–294
 Christ, Johann Friedrich 257–259
 Cicero 148, 168, 480, 498
 Clarendon (Hyde, Edward) 344–345, 350
 Clark, Ian D. L. 103–104
 Clephane, John 62
 Colley, Linda 490, 495
 Collingwood, Robin George 2
 Columbus, Christopher 122
 Comte, Auguste 419
 Condorcet, Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis
 de 12, 185, 289, 379–386, 388, 394–395,
 397, 410, 414–415, 419–427
 Constant, Benjamin 134–136, 450, 462
 Cooper, Lane 239
 Copernicus 423
 Corsini, Lorenzo (Cardinal) 225
 Cortés, Hernán 122
 Croce, Benedetto 219
 Cromwell, Oliver 93–94, 361
- Dacier, Anne 437
 D'Alembert, Jean-Baptiste le Rond 20,
 137, 165, 167, 192, 442–443, 445–446, 452
 Dalrymple, Sir David 101, 112–113, 124, 330
 Dalrymple, Sir James 313
 Dalrymple, Sir John 327–328, 367
 Daniell, Samuel 351–352
 Dante Alighieri 177, 244
 Darnley, Henry 334

- Dees, Richard H. 63, 86
 Defoe, Daniel 477
 De las Casas, Bartolomé 123
 De Mas, Enrico 219
 Descartes, René 6–7, 18, 221–223,
 238–239, 397, 402, 407, 412, 418,
 423–424, 433
 Diderot, Denis 18, 21, 137, 165, 167, 173,
 376–377
 Dilthey, Wilhelm 190, 249, 252, 276
 Dodwell, Henry 353
 Douglas, William 121
 Dreizehnter, Alois 224
 Dryden, John 478
 Dubos, Jean-Baptiste 21, 137, 437
 Dundas, Henry 129

 Echard, Laurence 345, 350–351, 355–356,
 358–362, 368, 370–371, 480, 489–490,
 494, 498–499
 Edelstein, Dan 437–438
 Eichhorn, Johann G. 194
 Eichhorn, Karl Friedrich 301
 Elizabeth I 89–91, 114, 175
 Ernesti, Johann August 258–259
 Erskine, John 105, 112

 Felton, Henry 472
 Ferguson, Adam 2, 21, 36, 307, 322–325,
 331, 336, 338, 343, 482–483, 494–495,
 498–501, 503
 Ferguson, Niall 487
 Ferguson, Robert 367
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 299–300
 Fisch, Max 218
 Fleming, Robert 105, 110, 112
 Fontenelle, Bernard Le Bovier de 21, 437,
 442
 Forbes, Duncan 62, 67, 72, 77
 Fordun, John of 310, 330
 Fox, Charles James 329
 Frankel, Charles 413–414, 426
 Frederick II 161, 166, 173, 176, 185, 193, 499
 Freebairn, Robert 311
 Fubini, Mario 219

 Gadamer, Hans-Georg 190
 Galileo 64, 227, 402, 404, 406–407, 418,
 423
 Gassendi, Pierre 402
 Gatterer, Johann Christoph 21, 250, 253,
 282–288, 292, 304
 Gay, Peter 15, 17, 102, 437–438, 445
 Gebauer, Georg Christian 276

 Gengembre, Gérard 391
 Gesner, Johann Matthias 257–258, 285
 Giannone, Pietro 21, 49, 226
 Gibbon, Edward 2, 5, 12, 13–14, 16–17,
 20–21, 22, 25–59, 98–99, 102–103, 109,
 175, 250, 252, 315, 367, 442, 469–470, 474,
 481–482, 502
 Gibson, John 331–332
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 250
 Goldsmith, Oliver 482, 489, 491, 493, 498
 Goodall, Walter 116, 311, 334
 Göschen, Johann Friedrich Ludwig 301
 Goyard-Fabre, Simone 397–398
 Gray, John 261
 Grell, Chantal 20, 437, 439–441, 450–451,
 467–468
 Grotius, Hugo 227, 229
 Guicciardini, Francesco 50, 118, 246, 303
 Guthrie, William 260, 345, 348–352, 358,
 364–368, 370–371

 Habermas, Jürgen 401–404, 406, 415, 427,
 435
 Halhead, Nathaniel 129
 Hamann, Johann Georg 11
 Hamilton, Elizabeth 371
 Harder, Johann J. 195
 Harrington, James 144, 500
 Hastings, Warren 125
 Hearne, Thomas 472–473, 478
 Heeren, Arnold H. L. 261–265, 270,
 274, 278–282, 285, 292–293, 298, 301,
 303–304
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 9–10, 99,
 160, 192, 300, 404, 419, 421, 453
 Helvétius 376–377, 388, 397, 447, 458
 Henri IV 86, 169–170, 175–177
 Henry, Robert 335
 Herder, Johann Gottfried 2, 3, 4, 5–6, 11,
 21, 22, 99, 189–216, 250, 255, 276, 287,
 290–292, 298
 Herodotus 55, 168, 231, 444
 Heumann, Johann 283
 Heyne, Christian Gottlob 255, 257–264,
 270, 282, 300–301, 304
 Hobbes, Thomas 65–66, 68–69, 227–229,
 402, 407
 Holbach, Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron
 de 14–15, 374–375, 377, 380, 382–384,
 386, 397
 Home, John 108
 Home, Henry 327
 Homer 142, 175, 234–236, 243, 258–259,
 455

- Hooke, Nathaniel 480–481, 483, 489,
 494–495, 497–498
 Hooke, Robert 97
 Horace 257, 477–478
 Howard, Martha W. 137
 Hughes, John 352, 355–356
 Humboldt, Wilhelm von 259, 298–300
 Hume, David 1, 2, 5, 8–9, 12, 14–16, 17, 20,
 22, 31, 38–39, 41–42, 44, 46–49, 52–54,
 58, 61–99, 102–103, 109, 118, 192–194, 250,
 252–253, 261, 307–311, 315–319, 323–325,
 328–331, 334–336, 338–341, 343–345, 354,
 356, 358, 366–367, 369–371
 Hurd, Richard 75–76
- Innes, Thomas 313–315, 317, 319, 323, 336,
 339–340
 Iselin, Isaak 21, 191–194, 199, 203, 208,
 288–292
 Israel, Jonathan 14
- Jefferson, Thomas 307
 Jaucourt, Louis de 458
 Johnson, James William 474, 502
 Johnson, Samuel 330, 338
- Kant, Immanuel 11, 13, 203, 291, 330, 378,
 404
 Kennet, Basil 351, 479, 491–493, 496–497,
 503
 Kennett, White 351
 Kepler, Johannes 402, 418, 423
 Kimber, Isaac 363–364
 Kirk, Linda 15
 Knox, John 312, 316, 334
 Kohen, Nancy F. 487
 Köhler, Johann David 277
- La Barre, Jean-François 174, 180
 La Baumelle, Laurent A. 161–162
 Lally, Thomas Arthur 180, 183–184
 Lamberton, Robert 139–140
 Lamennais, Félicien 373, 386, 391–395
 Lecerclé, Jean-Louis 450–451
 Le Goff, Jacques 172
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 205, 407
 Leigh, John 155
 Le Moyne, Pierre 345–348, 353, 471
 Lenglet, Nicolas du Fresnoy 154
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 10, 197, 250
 Levine, Joseph 476
 Limborch, Phillip 105
 Livingston, Donald 62–63
 Livy 27, 40, 51, 137, 302, 311, 345, 347, 455,
 478, 480, 493, 495, 500
- Locke, John 66–67, 70, 160, 239, 409, 420,
 423, 430
 Loraux, Nicole 463
 Louis XIV 95, 170–171, 176
 Louis XV 155–156, 166, 174
 Louis XVI 389
 Luther, Martin 193, 195, 269
 Lycurgus 138, 140, 143, 145, 148, 150, 441,
 446, 450, 458, 461–463
- Mabillon, Dom Jean 159, 314
 Mably, Gabriel Bonnot de 21, 134–135,
 381–382, 388, 439, 446–447, 450–468
 Macaulay, Catherine 20, 371
 Macaulay, Thomas 318, 371
 MacFerchar, Fergus 310, 312
 Machiavelli, Niccolò 40, 50–52, 168, 500
 Maclaurin, Colin 111
 Macpherson, James 336–338
 Macpherson, John 339–340
 Mair, John 311, 313
 Maistre, Joseph de 373, 386, 388, 396
 Maitland, William 331
 Manuel, Frank 409–410, 414, 418–419
 Marmontel, Jean-François 14
 Marx, Karl 328, 404, 435
 Mary, Queen of Scots 89, 101, 113–117, 119,
 121, 316, 320, 334
 Mat-Hasquin, Michèle 444, 459
 Mathon de la Cour 439, 459, 461–462
 Mauzi, Robert 375
 McArthur, Neil 63
 McUre, John 331
 Meinecke, Friedrich 4, 190, 249–250, 252,
 277
 Méricam-Bourdet, Myrtille 158–159
 Mersenne, Marin 402, 430
 Meyer, Michel 387
 Michaelis, Johann David 265–266, 285
 Michelet, Jules 178
 Middleton, Conyers 56–57, 480
 Millar, John 21, 193, 328–329, 343, 358,
 367
 Miller, Eugene F. 83–84
 Mills, John 481, 498–499
 Milton, John 351–352, 356
 Mirandola, Pico della 245, 402, 406
 Momigliano, Arnaldo 475
 Montagu, Richard Wortley 482
 Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat
 Baron de 3, 8, 12, 16, 18, 22, 32–33, 38,
 58, 63, 71–72, 133–152, 154, 192, 208–210,
 216, 250, 252, 321, 325, 327, 445, 447, 456,
 458, 464
 Möser, Justus 250, 255, 276–277, 304

- Mosheim, Johann Lorenz 267–268
 Mossner, Ernest 69
 Muldoon, James 488
 Münchhausen, Gerlach A.F. von 255–258

 Naucerus, Johannes 276
 Newton, Isaac 97, 111–112, 418, 423–424, 443, 460
 Nicole, Pierre 238
 Nicolson, William 352
 Niebuhr, Barthold Georg 250, 301–305
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 374, 377, 403, 427
 Nimmo, William 332, 335
 Norman, Larry F. 437
 Numa 148, 491

 O'Brien, Karen 13, 172, 187
 O'Connor, Thomas 477
 Oldfield, Joshua 105
 Oldmixon, John 345, 351, 357–358, 360–362, 370–371, 485
 Ozanam, Frédéric 386, 391

 Pagden, Anthony 501
 Pauw, Cornelius de 123, 439, 459, 462–468
 Perizonius 302
 Perrault, Charles 437
 Peter I (the Great) 170, 173, 176
 Phillipson, Nicholas 104
 Philo Judaeus 405–406
 Pierse, Siofra 19, 444
 Pinkerton, John 339
 Pitt, William 486
 Pizarro, Francisco 122
 Plato 137, 144, 224, 227, 243, 380, 405, 426, 429, 446, 459
 Plutarch 3, 117, 133–152, 440–441, 443–444, 446, 452, 456, 460, 493
 Pocock, John G. A. 61, 115, 119
 Polybius 118
 Pomeau, René 184
 Pompadour, Madame de 155, 166
 Pope, Alexander 480
 Pufendorf, Samuel von 229
 Pütter, Johann Stephan 272–274, 277

 Ralph, James 345, 348–351, 355, 357–360, 364, 367–371
 Ramsay, Allan 336
 Ramsay, Andrew Michael 477
 Ranke, Leopold von 20, 250, 303–305
 Rapin, Paul de Thoyras 67, 155, 351
 Rapin, René 345–348, 351
 Raresby, John (Sir) 360
 Rawson, Elizabeth 447
 Raynal, Guillaume Thomas François Abbé 5, 18, 21, 123, 125, 128
 Rennell, James 125
 Renwick, John 173–174
 Ridpath, George 332, 335
 Roberts, Jennifer 463
 Robertson, William 2, 14–17, 21, 39, 44, 46–48, 52, 57, 101–131, 193, 252–253, 310–311, 319–323, 327, 331–333, 337, 343, 367
 Robertson, William, Father 104–107
 Rollin, Charles 158, 439–447, 453, 463, 471, 478–479
 Romulus 148, 490
 Rosenthal, Jerome 160
 Rossi, Paulo 404, 407
 Rouille, Pierre Julien 478–479
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 9, 12, 72, 98, 134–135, 289–291, 323, 411, 439–442, 446–450, 452, 456–465, 467
 Ruddiman, Thomas 311
 Rühs, Friedrich 301

 Sabine, George 76
 Sakmann, Paul 163
 Salber Phillips, Mark 16, 475
 Sallust 137, 345, 347, 493
 Sarpi, Paolo 50
 Savigny, Friedrich Carl von 300–301
 Schmauß, Johann J. 277
 Schiller, Friedrich 21, 203, 212–213, 292
 Schleiermacher, Friedrich 299–300
 Schlözer, August Ludwig von 21, 250, 253, 277, 282–283, 285–288, 292, 304
 Scott, Walter (Sir) 336, 340
 Shaw, Lachlan 332
 Sirven, Pierre-Paul 180, 182
 Smith, Adam 9, 12, 21, 29, 40–41, 44, 46, 52–54, 58, 111, 307, 319, 325–328, 331, 336
 Smollett, Tobias 307
 Socrates 224, 226, 380, 432, 460
 Solon 138, 140–146, 150
 Spinoza, Baruch 15
 Spittler, Ludwig Timotheus 266–271, 274–279, 282, 298, 304
 Stein, Freiherr, vom 301
 Stevenson, John 107
 Stewart, Dugald 9, 101, 319, 322, 340, 343, 367
 Stewart, John B. 62

- Strahan, William 307, 331, 335
 Stuart, Charles Edward 183
 Stuart, Gilbert 329–331, 333–334

 Tacitus 37, 40, 137, 227, 311, 345, 478
 Taguieff, Pierre-André 385, 398–399
 Temple, William 472
 Theseus 138, 140, 142
 Thucydides 8, 118, 347, 460
 Tytler, William 334
 Turgot, Anne-Robert-Jacques, Baron de
 Laune 7, 409–410, 414–421, 425, 428

 Varro 230–231, 353
 Vauvilliers, Jean-François de 459,
 462–463
 Vercruysse, Jeroom 154
 Vertot, René Aubert (abbé) de 478–479
 Vico, Giambattista 2, 8, 22, 217–246,
 401–404, 427–436
 Vidal-Naquet, Pierre 463
 Virgil 137, 175, 258, 353, 455, 477–478, 489
 Voltaire 3, 5, 9–10, 13–14, 16, 19, 21, 22,
 31–32, 33, 59, 102, 104, 128, 153–187, 191,
 192, 194, 196, 211, 250, 252–253, 264, 270,
 275, 287, 289–290, 307, 315, 376–377,
 386, 388, 396, 410–415, 419, 421, 424–425,
 437–439, 442–446, 449–450, 452–455,
 458–461, 467
 Vyverberg, Henry 411, 413–414, 421

 Wallis, John 97
 Walpole, Horace 118
 Walton, Craig 64
 Ward, Addison 489
 Watson, James 335
 Wegelin, Jacob 191, 293–295
 Werenfels, Samuel 105–106
 Wertz, Spencer K. 73
 Wexler, Victor 67
 Whalley, Peter 472
 Wheare, Degory 352–354, 362
 Wilson, Kathleen 484
 Winckelmann, Johann J. 192, 216, 250,
 255, 259–261, 276, 304
 Winterer, Caroline 437
 Wishart, William 112
 Wolf, Friedrich August 299–301
 Wolff, Christian 293
 Womersley, David 123
 Wotton, William 472, 479–480, 491, 498
 Wren, Christopher Michael 97
 Wright, Johnson Kent 451

 Xenophon 444, 446, 452, 459